Far North Express

FoFNL

The Friends of the Far North Line

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Rail for All
New report - 3

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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www.fofnl.org.uk/fne/cps/fne82.html is a companion page with some web links and larger versions of pictures found in this issue. This sign on a page denotes available material: *WWW*

FoFNL Office Bearers

Articles in *Far North Express* are attributed, except for 'news' items, and do not necessarily reflect the views of the committee.

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FAR NORTH EXPRESS IS PUBLISHED IN JANUARY, MAY AND SEPTEMBER

Cover Photo: The southbound Stobart container train passing under the Tower Road Bridge beside Culloden Wood on the Highland Main Line on 30 December 2020. 68006 hauling a full load of 20 containers, the final 14 being Tesco branded rigid boxes. This is how to move freight. Safe in all seasons, electrically-hauled in the future and 20 fewer HGV exhausts.

Photo: **Sandy Colley**

Important Note to Our Members

Our Treasurer, David Start, has requested that we make sure to fill in the 'reference' box on **all** bank transactions. The ideal format would be **full name + membership number.**

If we don't do it ourselves the bank generates a reference, and data protection legislation prevents the bank from being allowed to inform David to which name the reference is attached. This can cause confusion when two or more members share a surname.

STOP PRESS! *Rail for All*

www

We have just been given sight of a comprehensive piece of work done by David Spaven and David Prescott via Deltix Transport Consulting. The report, commissioned by the Scottish Green Party, takes a detailed look at what can be done for rail for the whole of Scotland. It is a blueprint for the way forward, recovering from the pandemic and addressing the need to stop using fossil fuels. For up-to-date links see www.fofnl.org.uk/fne/cps/fne82.html

This short extract from the report gives a flavour:

This is not an exhaustive study, and in the case of, for example, recommended station and route re-openings, detailed analysis will be needed on a case-by-case basis to establish feasibility and definitive costs. However the study argues strongly (see Section 3.4) that the Climate Emergency demands a significant move away from road-based transport to rail-based, to reduce both emissions and energy needs – so a streamlining of the currently complex and time-consuming appraisal process for rail projects is required. In the words of the Scottish Association for Public Transport, 'Scottish Transport Appraisal Guidance (STAG) needs to be amended to reflect climate change and other environmental priorities when assessing transport projects, rather than focusing on car journey time reductions which generate more journeys.'

The item which will really make headlines is David Prescott's suggestion to construct a Forth Tunnel from Leith to south of Kirkcaldy!

It feels especially appropriate and necessary to wish all our readers a Happy New Year. Those who work in the rail industry have had an especially difficult struggle in 2020 - things will get better soon, not least because of pent-up demand for 'normality'.

The financial strain put on governments by the pandemic has been extreme. The signs are good though that the UK Government is not touting 'austerity' as the fix this time around. Concentrating on investment, and thereby providing extra jobs as well as much needed results, is clearly the way forward.

There are encouraging signs that there has been a shift away from automatically assessing all projects on the basis of 'the greatest benefit to the greatest number of people'. Although superficially that has a ring of common sense about it the inevitable result has been under-investment in areas with fewer residents.

The Highlands has very specific transport needs in order to bring about the modal shift required to address climate change and to reduce the energy waste that is endemic in the way we travel. Talking up electric cars, and providing wider roads for more of them to drive on, is simply not the way forward. History will not look kindly on the spending of more than £6bn still planned to dual fast roads, instead of investing the money in the Highland rail routes.

One of the most-used arguments for dualling the A9 and A96 is safety and the avoidance of driver frustration. To us the obvious cure for both is to attract as many people, and as much freight, as possible, to the safety of a fast, reliable, electrified, double-track railway.

At this Autumn's UN Climate Change Conference (COP26) in Glasgow we should be looking to impress the world with our plans. Having to admit to the present regressive road-widening policy would be nothing less than embarrassing.

The Far North Line

Our immediate priorities are, as always, working for improvements on the Far North Line. We are hoping to hear very soon that the Lentran Loop plan will emerge from GRIP3, 'Option selection' - please keep an eye on our website for announcements. As mentioned elsewhere in this issue, we have strong feelings about what the choice should be. The lessons which have been learned from the descoping of the Borders railway will undoubtedly be in the minds of the Transport Scotland decision

makers. We are in a very different time now and, in the same way as we do as individuals, it is necessary to consider whether some extra spending now might achieve a much better result. Having to undo new work in the foreseeable future would be an avoidable expense. Or, to put it another way, better to put in a long dynamic loop between Clachnaharry and Clunes than a short static one.

There are other loops needed further north both to allow an hourly service to Tain, and to break up the extremely long sections between Helmsdale and Georgemas Junction.

Two more things: a Georgemas Curve to allow direct travel from Thurso to the South (with a station at Halkirk) and a second Sunday service, specified by Transport Scotland, to increase leisure travel the length of the line.

Ian Budd

FoFNL Business

AGM & Conference 2021

FoFNL's 2021 AGM & Conference is planned to take place on Friday 18 June, at Ross County FC stadium in Dingwall.

Our four main speakers are **Kate Forbes MSP**, Cabinet Secretary for Finance; **Bill Reeve**, Director of Rail, Transport Scotland; **Phil Sherratt**, Editor, *Modern Railways* magazine and **David Simpson**, Operations Director, ScotRail. There will also be a report from **Frank Roach**, Partnership Manager, HITRANS and a short update from **Alice Gillman** of Vivarail about their latest rolling stock plans.

The day normally begins around 10:00 and is wound up before 16:00.

A decision to postpone, in the event of continuing Covid-19 restrictions, will be published a few weeks ahead.

FoFNL Committee Meeting

Report of FoFNL Committee Meeting on 19 October 2020 (by Zoom)

Present: Ian Budd, Mike Lunan, Richard Ardern, David Spaven, David Start, Iain MacDonald, Neil Wallace and Frank Roach (HITRANS)

Apologies: Angus Stewart, Malcolm Wood

HITRANS Report

FR gave a wide-ranging update which included the following:

- successful timber trials and other freight opportunities emerging
- implications of COVID-19 issues on passengers and services
- 'request to stop' facility to be provided at Scotscalder first

Lentran Loop

Agreed to continue to push for a dynamic loop, referring to precedents from elsewhere. Noted that NR were actively looking at various options under GRIP3.

Electrification of FNL

Accepting that current proposals extend north to Tain, need more information on practical combinations of battery and hydrogen options for remaining sections.

Station Survey

It was agreed that this needs to be done, notwithstanding the current Covid-19 restrictions and the committee can confer by email on how to proceed.

Archive Material

RA outlined records available and highlighted current restrictions in Highland Archive Centre facilities.

FR offered his records for archive in due course. RA to pursue this further.

Future Committee Members

IB agreed to keep a record of suggested new committee members for future reference. There is no requirement at present. Possible candidates were discussed.

Spending Issues

It was agreed that we should consider spending money on occasion to support relevant worthwhile publicity, campaigning and education/training.

Examples discussed included consideration of contributing to the cost of a banner at Inverness Station FNL and Kyle platform entrance, making a modest donation to a relevant rail campaign, and giving financial support to an appropriate education or training position, perhaps by means of a bursary.

Committee Minutes

Agreed that summary style reports would be included in *Far North Express* rather than website. Less formal approach would be acceptable. Any important financial decisions would be specifically recorded.

AOB

Treasurer confirmed healthy states of FoFNL accounts.

Neil Wallace, Secretary

Stakeholder Panel Relaunch

ScotRail announcement, 27 October 2020:

Scotland's Railway has reformed its Stakeholder Panel as it continues to engage with the railway's key stakeholders.

The original Stakeholder Panel was created in 2015 as part of Abellio being awarded the franchise. The Panel helps examine the performance of Scotland's Railway, as well as bring intuition and challenges to its work.

The relaunch sees new membership in place, with the appointment of CBI Scotland Director Tracy Black as Chair, alongside senior representatives from Scotland's key sectors.

The panel currently meets three times a year and will focus on a number of themes, including the decarbonisation of the railway, the contribution Scotland's Railway can make to the financial recovery, and how the railway will grow again in light of the Covid-19 pandemic.

The independent members are:

- Tracy Black, Director, CBI Scotland (Chair)
- Morven Brooks, Chief Executive, Disability Equality Scotland
- Marc Crothall, Chief Executive, Scottish Tourism Alliance
- Willie Fraser, Vice President, Market Director, Rail EMEA, Jacobs
- Louise Macdonald OBE, Chief Executive, YoungScot
- Andrew Malcolm, Chief Executive, Malcolm Group
- Trisha McAuley OBE, Scotland Board Member, Transport Focus
- Suzie McCheyne, Rail74 Community Rail Partnership
- Stewart Nicol, Chief Executive, Inverness Chamber of Commerce

Pandora was sitting at home listening to one of the Reith Lectures a few days before Christmas. In it former Governor of the Bank of England, Mark Carney, was discussing the value society puts on a human life. He was doing so in the context of Covid-19 and the dilemma between eradicating the disease and maintaining as much as possible of the economy. Pandora sensed a light going on - it couldn't surely be a coincidence that the Governor and the former head of Network Rail, Mark Carne, were never seen in the same room together. Were they perhaps one and the same person, differing only because a trainee in the false documentation department made an error?

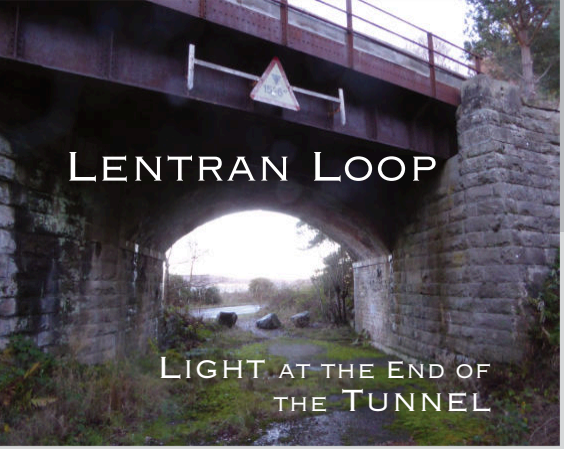
An old man broods on mortality

Pandora allowed his mind to contemplate the value of a human life (as one who had passed the actuarial exams such contemplations are not wholly unfamiliar). Mark I (the Gov) explained that different countries place different - widely different - values on a human life. In the USA it is between $1 million and $10 million, which is hardly useful in forming public policy. In most of western Europe it's quite a bit higher than in the UK. What about us? This is where Pandora began to hear the approaching hoof-beats of a hobby horse. Let's think about Mark II for a while, and let's bring in alongside him the Head Honcho Of The Highways. How much will each of them spend to prevent one human death on their system? And while we're at it, how many inches of print will the newspapers occupy if one of these unfortunate deaths should occur?

Pandora believes that the answers will be different - widely different. He is not able to explain this, except perhaps by noting that the Honcho is responsible for far more deaths than Mark II ever was, and that Stalin was fond of pointing out that whereas one death is a tragedy, one million deaths are a statistic. Sleeps comfortably the Honcho? 1700 deaths a year? *5 a day*.

There is a twist to the tale. If a single death - a suicide, say - occurs on the railway, the protocol is to have trains running again in no more than 90 minutes. The railway is rightly seen as a public good, and it should be out of use for the minimum period needed to allow the BTP to satisfy themselves that no crime had been committed (the victim was not fleeing attack, for example) by interviewing the driver and any other witnesses. If the driver in a single vehicle car crash is killed Police Scotland routinely close the road for several hours, necessitating lengthy diversions and massive delay. What are they looking for? The public good of Her Majesty's highways seems to be unimportant. Is there a public good in the Police knowing *why* the crash occurred? Pandora doubts it, believing that a box somewhere merely needs to be ticked.

In each case a life had been lost, but the effect on society - on the rest of us - is disproportionate. Yet a death on the railway has a far higher cost-of-avoidance that a death on the roads. Pandora wishes that Mark I and Mark II could explain this to him. Pandora wishes that the Honcho actually existed, for if he did he too could answer a few pointed questions instead of hiding behind Comrade Stalin.



[Left] An unusual view of the Far North Line - at Phopachy, near Lentran - nearest the camera, the metal girder bridge from the widening to double track of 1913/14, and behind, the original stone arch from 1862.

Photo: Richard Ardern

At the end of the nineteenth century late running on the Highland Railway was a major problem. The cash-strapped company did its best to remedy the situation by widening significant lengths of its route to double track and installing many new passing loops. The last section of its route to be widened was the six miles from Clachnaharry to Clunes which was completed in 1914.

The HR's problems have a familiar ring to them and one can only imagine their thoughts if they'd been told that after only 52 years their vital work would be undone.

The 1960s was a time when many felt that railways had had their day and there was a view that somehow they should not make a loss. This way of thinking now seems rather quaint - a bit like being upset that pavements require financial support.

By the 1990s it was apparent that railways were becoming essential and studies began to be made to ascertain what needed to be done. The imperative of countering climate change has added impetus to the process.

The first mention by FoFNL of the need for work on the erstwhile double-track section of the FNL was at the AGM in 2004:

On the Far North Line, once Invernet is in place, the most pressing need for an additional loop would be in the Lentran/Clunes area. This would be essential to allow further freight or passenger traffic growth but also invaluable at times of late running.

In 2006 the Highlands and Islands Enterprise *Highland Rail Room for Growth* study was published, suggesting a more radical approach:

In order to improve timetable planning and performance (particularly if trains are running out of course) it is recommended that consideration be given to re-instating the section of double line from approximately the 2 milepost (west of Clachnaharry) to Clunes at 7.6 miles. This section was singled during rationalization in the 1960s. This would mean installation of colour light signalling and track circuit block to Clunes or a suitable point further north, controlled from Inverness panel. [From that point northwards, RETB signalling would apply.]

An estimated total cost of £15m at 2006 prices for doubling the whole six miles seems like a bargain when you consider the transformation to FNL and Kyle Line reliability it would achieve.

The operational slowdown imposed in 2005, adding some 25 minutes to the end to end journey time from Wick to Inverness, has caused major problems for timetabling. Lentran proved to be a major pinch point. Late running by the first train south from Wick of more than 15 minutes causes it to be held at Muir of Ord for up to a further 50 minutes to allow the northbound Wick and Kyle services to come through on the single track from Inverness.

The alternative, to delay them further, would cause delays further up the line to other trains, with a domino effect which could continue all day and cause more missed connections at Inverness.

As this is being written at the beginning of 2021 we know that Transport Scotland and Network Rail are working hard to decide exactly what level of expenditure is appropriate and affordable. Our southern neighbours are actively considering installing three dynamic (i.e. long enough for trains to pass at speed) loops on the Salisbury-Exeter line, to alleviate late-running and congestion. It would seem counter-intuitive when already spending a considerable sum, to do the job on the FNL in a less than satisfactory way.

Ian Budd & Richard Ardern

GRIP (Governance for Railway Investment Projects)							
Initiate		Choose Option	Design		Build	Close	
1 Output Definition	2 Project Feasibility	3 Option Selection	4 Single Option Development	5 Detailed Design	6 Construction Test & Commission	7 Scheme Handback	8 Project Closeout

GRIP - Richard Ardern contemplates the process

It is wonderful to see a GRIP 4 (Single Option Development) document for a Highland line at long, long last.

Aberdeen to Inverness

The GRIP 4 is included with the planning application for the proposed new two platform station at Dalcross to be known as Inverness Airport Station. Two platforms means there will be a passing loop, but sadly only a little over half a mile long; not a dynamic loop where trains can cross on the move.

Once a project gets as far as planning permission, GRIP 5 stage cannot be far away. The Dalcross application postulates a favourable-wind completion date around Christmas 2022. But I mustn't get carried away. HITRANS started developing the project in 2005. **[17 years ago, and counting!]**

Long and bitter experience tells me that rail projects often overrun their time – time after time. Recently, I reread my Chairman's report to the FoFNL AGM on 20 November 2004. It said: "*The Chairman went on to comment on some of the ideas in the [FoFNL] policy document...the single track nature of our lines makes them incredibly difficult to operate...It is amazing and terribly disappointing that such an obvious enhancement as the Orton Loop on the Inverness to Aberdeen line has still not got the green light after 10 years.*" **[26 years now!]**

We did see a GRIP 2 engineering study shared by Transport Scotland in March 2011 which gave a timeline for completion of the whole Aberdeen to Inverness project (an hourly frequency with journey times of just two hours) by February 2017. *

With a change of Transport Minister, the project eventually re-emerged with completion extended to 2030. **[36 years now!]** Phase 1 which gave us Forres station and the Inverurie redoubling, but not the Orton Loop, was completed in 2019.

Far North Line

Hopefully we shall see GRIP 4 and GRIP 5 documents for the much-needed, preferably dynamic, loop at Lentran on the Far North Line in, (or shortly after), the Finance Secretary's budget announcement on 28 January.

Highland Main Line

This line has also suffered in the funding stakes as the then First Minister's 2008 promises of significantly improved journey times between Inverness and Edinburgh/Glasgow have still not been realised. The promised increase in frequency has largely been honoured but at the expense of greater congestion because of long stretches of single track. **[13 years so far...]**. Indeed as early as mid-2009 the Transport Scotland Board was having to defer an offer of funding authorisation from the Office of Rail Regulation for the HML project presumably because they already had their hands full with EGIP and other projects.

Getting to GRIPs

The latest plans for the railways to take account of the Climate Change Emergency propose Decarbonisation of the railway by 2035. It is impossible not to note that that is only 14 years away! It is now a political requirement. Hopefully there is a realisation of just how much this involves such that plans are afoot to staff-up Network Rail to cope and to reassemble the Rail Industry electrification teams and their infrastructure contractors for this massive and necessary undertaking.

Finance is always a problem, but the general consensus for the post pandemic period is that construction projects are one of the best ways of stimulating the economy and providing a strong base for the future. There should be plenty of jobs to be had and massive demand for materials.

There is a huge challenge for the Scottish Government and the industry here. We hope they will enjoy getting to GRIPS with it.

WWW

Dual the Highland Main Line

In October 2020 the Scottish Green Party opened a campaign to dual the HML. Whilst FoFNL is an apolitical organisation, we can only applaud this campaign which has been set up to persuade the Scottish Government to act on the promise it made in 2008 to invest properly in the Highland Main Line.

The government protests that it *has* been investing in the line. This is true - £57m has been spent on extending a couple of passing loops and modernising some signalling. However, this equates to **1.9%** of the **£3bn** currently being spent on dualling the A9 between Perth and Inverness. (+A96, another £3bn)

It is the railway that needs to be dualled, as most of it is 'single-track-with-passing-places', hardly the kind of infrastructure you would expect the government to provide between its cities, especially having declared a 'Climate Emergency'.

The online campaign, which has effectively been superseded by the *Rail for All* report, invited people to send the Minister a message. This is neither about party politics, nor is it a local issue. We support it because the HML is the rail route passengers use to get to the Far North Line from most of Scotland and further south.

Ian Budd

This article by one of FoFNL's Vice Presidents, ***John Finnie MSP****, first appeared in the* Inverness Courier *on 13 November.*

The Highland Main Line was an impressive piece of engineering when it was built in the middle of the 19th century, offering then unprecedented connectivity between the Highlands, the rest of Scotland and beyond.

Sadly, little improvement has been made to the line since. What was a marvel of the Victorian era is now outdated.

My party colleague Ariane Burgess recently launched a campaign urging the Scottish Government to act swiftly to improve the line. Her urgency is well justified; the majority of the 118-mile line remains single track. This puts a very low ceiling on capacity and means that one breakdown brings the entire network north of Perth to a grinding halt.

Road traffic is one of the biggest polluters here. It isn't right that in a climate emergency the quickest way to get to the Central Belt is to drive.

The dualling of the Highland Main Line would increase capacity for passengers, making the Highlands more accessible, but an often-overlooked benefit is the potential to move more freight on the line. Companies like Tesco and the wood panel manufacturer Norbord have recognised the benefits of using rail freight in the Highlands, such as reduced costs and lower emissions, but until the line receives a major upgrade, there are limits to how many can follow in their footsteps.

The potential is enormous. A dualled main line could carry significantly more freight to and from the Highlands, providing an economic boost for the region. The companies using rail freight now do so because it is cheaper and cleaner. With the right investment it can also be quicker.

By significantly increasing the amount of freight on the line, you reduce the amount on the A9. Not only would fewer heavy vehicles on the road mean lower emissions, but it would also mean better traffic flow and less damage to the roads from lorries.

The remote nature of the Highlands means there will be a role for cars and lorries in transport for a long time to come yet. Nobody disputes that. Indeed, road haulage working in tandem with longer stretch rail freight is vital, but the benefits of improving rail connectivity in the region are significant.

To continue to ignore the needs of the railway is unacceptable. Back in 2006, a target was set to deliver sub three-hour journey between Inverness and Edinburgh or Glasgow. Fourteen years later that hasn't been met.

The modern history of the Highland Main Line is one of delay and neglect. The time to end that is now. The Highlands deserves better.

Borders Railway - Model for Recovery

This article first appeared in The Scotsman *on 8 October 2020.*

When stand-up Nathan Cassidy entertained an audience of 38 at the Three Sisters on 24 August, it was for a moment as though Covid-19 had all been a nightmare and this could not possibly be the only surviving live event of the Edinburgh Festival Fringe.

People like Nathan and the brave souls of the hospitality industry deserve our admiration for their portrayal of the old normal as a spirit that continues to be with us, and Chancellor Rishi Sunak should share such recognition for his Eat Out to Help Out initiative.

However much we may relish the novelty of remote working, the reality is that gathering on Zoom or Teams succeeds only because the participants already know each other. So with the onset of autumn, pointers are needed as to how we can build back together towards an improved version of the world that we previously knew.

Thus whatever the controversy about its environmental impact, the HS2 project has come to be seen as the Keynesian touchstone of the belief that investing in infrastructure will yield the wealth and skills needed to carry us forward. Whereas detractors would have us believe it is a vanity project about speed, those in the know appreciate that it delivers much-needed capacity, not least for intermediate connectivity and for freight.

And more locally we have a striking demonstration of how investment in infrastructure can pay off. In present circumstances physical celebration of the Borders Railway's fifth anniversary was necessarily modest: a message on ScotRail customer screens, film footage broadcast at Edinburgh Waverley Station, and an invitation for pupils from local primaries to create posters highlighting what makes their area special. However a visit to the three stations in the Scottish Borders Council area told a more dramatic story.

At Stow a local contractor is busy converting the vacant station building with funding from Borders Railway Blueprint Fund, the Regeneration Capital Grant Fund, Railway Heritage Trust, ScotRail Stations Community Regeneration Fund, BCCF Environmental Landfill Trust, SSE Toddleburn Community Fund and EDF Longpark Community Fund into a bar and kitchen, a cycling hub and community room for the Stow Community Trust.

At Tweedbank work has started on the £29m Borders Innovation Park funded by Scottish Borders Council, Scottish Enterprise, Borders Railway Blueprint programme and the Edinburgh and South East Region City Deal to deliver high-quality business space, stimulate business growth and improve inward investment. Nearby there will be the Borders Gateway development creating up to 80 jobs in a new hotel, food kiosk, drive-through coffee shop and petrol station.

And when it opens next year, the home in Galashiels of the Great Tapestry of Scotland created by writer Alexander McCall Smith, historian Alistair Moffat and artist Andrew Crummy will tell our story from 8500 BC to the present day in 160 panels hand-stitched by over 1.000 people. In addition to interactive displays and audio guides, there will also be changing exhibitions and educational activities. The new centre will create 16 jobs, and the hoarding round the new building declares that the Railway has been one of the driving-forces behind the project.

The Borders Railway Blueprint has ensured that this was not just a transport project but is maximising opportunities for employment, business, tourism and leisure. The lesson has been learned for the reopening of the line to Levenmouth, now being taken forward by Transport Scotland with Fife Council, where the Levenmouth Reconnected Task Group has had its first meeting. The Scottish experience deserves to be in the forefront of best practice as the UK seeks to build back better from the pandemic.

John Yellowlees, Scottish Chair, CILT

Glenfarg Route - Cross-Party Support

This article by Anita Diouri appeared in the Dundee Courier *on 26 November 2020*

Kinross rail link 'could cut journey times from Perth to Edinburgh by 35 minutes'

Calls have been renewed for to reinstate the Kinross rail link, amid claims it would cut journey times from Perth to Edinburgh by up to 35 minutes.

The direct rail route from Edinburgh to Perth, via Dunfermline, Kinross and Glenfarg was closed in 1970 to make way for the M90 motorway.

As well as cutting journey times, it would create a transport hub in Kinross, serving the growing town and its residents working in the east coast region.

Conservative councillor Callum Purves of the Kinross-Shire ward said: "Reinstating the rail link to Kinross is a project that has strong support in the local community.

"As Kinross-shire continues to grow as a result of large-scale developments and with many local residents commuting outwith the area to get to work, the case for a new train station is stronger now than ever."

SNP MSP Roseanna Cunningham of Perthshire South and Kinross-shire echoed the call but said: "As far as I am aware, the biggest problem facing any campaign to restore a rail service for Kinross is that the original line serving the town, which ran between Perth and Edinburgh, has been almost entirely built over, in particular by the M90."**

Scottish Conservative leader, Douglas Ross said: "Kinross has a good case for a new train station."

**In fact, according to the *InterCity Express* project, "Much of the proposed route alignment is still in existence. Some development has inevitably taken place at a number of locations, and a four-mile tunnelled section would be required to avoid the M90 and Glenfarg village."

It is thought likely that the total cost of this project would be around half the cost of dualling either the A9, or the A96. Journeys from the FNL to Edinburgh and beyond would benefit enormously.

Put More Freight Onto Rail

The Herald 24 December 2020

The graphic photos of mile after mile of trucks in Kent ("France re-opens border, but only to UK travellers who test negative", *The Herald*, December 23) is surely a powerful stimulus to transfer as much of this freight as possible from road vehicles to rail containers through the Channel Tunnel and have the final delivery miles made by road at each end. This would eliminate the need for drivers during the majority of the journey time, take these enormous vehicles off our roads and reduce road pollution.

Where a consignment is not sufficient to fill a container, then computerised logistic modelling should make it possible for consignees to share part loads.

Dave Stewart, Glasgow

Royal Correction

Richard Ardern, feeling concerned about the possibility of imminent incarceration in the Tower of London, has asked us to apologise for the error in the text of his article in the last *FNE* about Royal Trains. He [and the editor] unfortunately allowed the Duke of Edinburgh to be referred to as "HM" instead of "HRH".

Timber Trial Notes

Frank Roach chats to the driver as a timber train pauses at Rogart. Photo: Jordan Kearney

UK based rail freight specialists Victa Railfreight led the trial operation last summer of 14 trains of round wood between Georgemas Junction and Inverness, with the cargo provided by Munro Harvesting destined for the Norbord processing plant at Dalcross.

Neil Sime, Managing Director, Victa Railfreight, talks about the timber trial

The trial was in response to discussions between the Cabinet Secretary for Rural Economy, Fergus Ewing (MSP for Inverness and Nairn) and the rail freight sector during 2019. These aimed to get rail re-established as a means of transporting some of the 10 million tonnes of timber felled each year in Scotland. The last regular rail movements of timber north of Inverness were 15 years ago.

A large number of parties from both railway and forestry industries, led by Victa, collaborated in making the trial possible. The aim of the trial was very much to prove what could be done, and to draw out any issues that need to be addressed, to make timber by rail a viable and sustainable business in the future. The date and length of the trial in August and early September were driven by operational and logistical constraints. To reflect the inherent inefficiencies of such a short-term operation, the trial received funding from the Scottish Strategic Rail Freight Fund and had the backing of the rail freight community in Scotland. The publication of the Scottish Transport Decarbonisation Action Plan just prior to the trial commencing was a timely reminder of the need for transfer of cargo from road to rail if the Scottish Government's ambitious climate change targets are to be met.

All of the planned trains operated, and performance was generally very good. The trains consisted of up to 14 DB Cargo BTA Bogie bolster wagons and two Class 37 locomotives provided by West Coast Railways. Existing paths, not required by other operators, were used, and the plan worked around already agreed engineering work commitments. Network Rail were very supportive and arranged use of the unloading facilities at Inverness, which allowed the whole train to be placed for unloading, simplifying this operation significantly. Jim Welsh at Georgemas Junction was a very flexible and supportive terminal operator, and HITRANS, through Frank Roach, supported the trial in many ways.

It was known that the BTA wagons were not an optimum long-term solution, but they were available in the timescales required, known to have been used for round wood in the past, and were suitably equipped with stanchions and securing equipment to ensure the safety of the loads, which is a key consideration for

moving timber on rail. The bulk of the timber moved was "wind blown" and thus quite dry and light, and in three metre lengths, so volumes did not utilise the full carrying capacity of the wagons. This had been factored into the trial planning and was one of the inefficiencies that we anticipated when applying for the grant funding.

It had been hoped to use the last week of the trial to demonstrate the potential for other flows with Kyle of Lochalsh, Kinbrace and Lairg all considered as loading points, and Elgin as a discharge location, but for various reasons, and despite a lot of work by those involved, it was not possible to make the necessary arrangements in the timescales available.

The trial received a high level of press coverage, including a three-minute slot on the BBC Scotland News Programmes on the last day, which generated a lot of interest, both within the timber industry and the wider public. One of the trial objectives had been about speaking to potential users, and the publicity undoubtably sparked the interest of serval key players in the timber business in the Far North leading to a greater understanding of the opportunities that are available and the challenges.

A number of conclusions and learning points, some expected and some not, emerged from the trial. On a practical level, the importance of maximising wagon payloads, and the challenges of securing and keeping wagons clean, was reinforced, along with the challenges of pathing and running long trains on the constrained infrastructure north of Inverness and the need for efficient collection, delivery and handling. The importance of local support for things like wagon maintenance and repairs also became apparent, as did the need to involve everyone in the supply chain (foresters, hauliers and receivers as well as the rail companies) to ensure that overall efficiency was maximised and delivery to the customer was optimised.

Commercially, the cost of moving timber by road from forest to the railhead, and the constraints imposed by restrictions on HGV movements over local roads, are key factors that could make or break the rail offer. Both forest and lineside loading, such as has taken place in the past at Kinbrace, could offer partial solutions to these challenges. Eliminating the end delivery leg makes a significant difference to freight economics. For the traffic involved in this trial, the proposed rail connection to the Norbord plant at Dalcross will achieve this.

The fragmented nature of the forestry industry, and the rapidly changing locations of product to load arising from availability of mature timber, is a challenge for the rail freight sector which is at its most efficient moving steady volumes between the same points on a regular basis. A sustainable timber operation will require a quite different, and highly flexible, mindset in order to be both efficient and sustainable.

Finally, the backing of Transport Scotland in supporting this trial was essential. With an initial target of around 1% of the timber felled in Scotland, Victa is now discussing with TS, and other interested parties, ways in which a sustainable timber-by-rail operation could be developed over the medium term.

Watch this space!!!

Frank Roach shared these thoughts:

- The trial proved that people are very willing to work together to make things happen, and that Network Rail can move incredibly fast.
- The trial also showed that the line currently has the capacity for regular timber traffic although a number of sidings need some remedial work to get them back into use.
- The vehicles used for the trial normally carry North Sea oil pipes - high payload wagons will need to be procured.
- Reinstatement of the Norbord factory connection on the Inverness-Aberdeen line would be a game changer and the trial has shown that there is now a lot of political and public interest in rail freight, especially its contribution to reducing transport's carbon footprint.

Frank Roach gave two research and strategy delivery reports important to the Far North Line to the HITRANS Partnership Meeting on 13 November:

Far North and Kyle Matters

Purpose of the report

To inform members of progress on Far North and Kyle rail lines infrastructure initially identified under the Points North agenda of 2016.

Fair Exchange

The creation of a signalling token exchange point (TEP) on the Radio Electronic Token Block (RETB) system at Stromeferry (which incidentally in August this year celebrated its 150th anniversary) is moving forward. A site visit was recently held to consider what is needed on the ground. The new TEP will:

- break up the long 40-minute section between Strathcarron and Kyle
- allow shunting to take place at Kyle more efficiently
- facilitate access to the track for maintenance
- help with traffic control during periods of rockfall stabilisation works.

HITRANS is contributing £230k to the project, of which 50% is from ERDF Smart Cities..

Lentran Loop

Development work has reached GRIP 3 level- option selection- on the project to create an additional loop between Clachnaharry and Clunes. In play are the length and type of loop- dynamic or static- and the way in which it is controlled.

Current loops have hydropneumatic points. They are pushed over by the train and spring back, so have a 15mph speed restriction, with their position confirmed to the driver by an indicator light, and a TPWS overspeed sensor on the track.

Radio tokens cannot be exchanged on the move so trains can only pass 'statically'. To pass dynamically (on the move) would require expensive resignalling to conventional colour lights. However, token control of points permitting loop entry/exit at 40mph and a long loop may mitigate the time penalty for token issue and authorisation to proceed.

Token control of points

In order to overcome the slow loop entry speed and the concomitant 15mph crawl to station stop within a loop, the control of the new motorised points rather than hydropneumatic ones is under development. Here the points are actuated by the issue of the electronic token itself. Muir of Ord south is the likely location for a trial.

Press'n'Ride/Request to Stop

The provision of a button to inform the train driver via the signalling system of an intending passenger at request stops is under development. The rational for this is to allow trains to pass through at linespeed when no stop is required, rather than slowing down on the off-chance that someone may be waiting at the station. This saves brakes, fuel, emissions and gives a performance buffer. HITRANS has drawn up a priority list based on linespeed, gradient and footfall, with Scotscalder being the likely trial site.

Level Crossings

Kildonan and Rogart Open Crossings are due for conversion to automatic crossings in Control Period 6. All North of Inverness crossings with the exception of Nigg are locally monitored i.e. the train driver is given an indication that the crossing lights and associated barriers are working correctly. Train speed over the crossing is 55mph maximum. However, if the crossing status is monitored by the signaller through the RETB system train line speeds could increase offering a meaningful journey time reduction.

Automatic Train Describers

Customer Information Screens at RETB stations are updated by the Darwin system which is

itself manually updated by the signaller. When a train is running late its arrival time at a station clears off the screen after its planned (but non-existent) departure. The passenger does not know if it is 1 or 100 minutes late. A proposed RETB modification should automate this process and predict arrival time based on the last confirmed location of the train.

Faster Token Exchange

The transaction time for a token exchange is timetabled at 1 minute, but crossing trains take longer with Train 1 giving up Token A, Train 2 giving up Token B, Train 2 receiving Token A, and Train 1 receiving Token B. An enhancement is under development that will dramatically reduce token exchange time.

Train For The Future

Purpose of the report

To appraise members of the potential for future rolling stock options in the HITRANS area.

HML electrification

As reported to the Board in September Scottish Ministers propose to electrify the Highland Main Line with overhead wires by 2035. With a likely end date of the current HST fleet in 2030, we will be keen to ensure that there is no delay in the start of electrification planning, with the danger that a fleet of bi-mode trains will be introduced as a thirty year stop gap.

Other routes

Tain-Inverness-Inverurie will be operated by alternative traction - transition solution (e.g. partial electrification and/or the use of alternative technology) by 2035 prior to electrification by 2045. The hydrogen transport cluster in Aberdeen is a key factor in this.

Glasgow-Oban-Mallaig and Dingwall-Kyle Tain-Wick will be operated by alternative traction - permanent solution - i.e. the use of battery or an alternative by 2035.

Battery technology

Battery trains were researched in our Wick Thurso Feasibility (WTF) study. The Vivarail 230 can cover 40-60 miles between charges which makes the route an ideal test bed. Power can be supplied during an 8 minute charge from a power bank of batteries that could be charged from constrained wind. The current train is limited to 60 mph making it unsuitable for the Far North but perhaps suitable for Dingwall-Kyle, and West Highland services.

There may be opportunities for a battery train to receive a 45 second zap while stopping at a station.

Hydrogen

A number of rolling stock owners and train builders are developing new or refurbished hydrogen trains. A hydrogen fuel cell is used to create electricity to drive traction motors/ charge batteries. To date hydrogen is stored within the rail vehicles taking up passenger capacity but underbody solutions are under development.

As more hydrogen is required per mile than polluting diesel, infrastructure may be required at termini for fuelling (currently fuelling for rural routes is carried out in city depots). This may lead to sharing of facilities with the hydrogen fuelled ferries of the future.

Hydrogen supply is key to this. Hydrogen created from natural gas reforming is not carbon free. Hydrogen created by electrolysation of off shore wind power offers a green possibility, and the renewable energy cluster around Caithness/Orkney may be well placed to assist.

Equally, Opportunity Cromarty Firth's proposals for floating off shore wind also offers a hydrogen supply, with distilleries, the gas grid, aquaculture and other industrial processes creating demand.

A further hydrogen source could come from the combustion of Refuse Derived Fuel created at the Longman waste facility in Inverness. There are examples from Germany of municipal bus and tram fleets being powered in this way.

An Act of Reciprocity

Without the distractions that tend to make life hectic the recent lockdown has provided an opportunity for reflection and contemplation and a chance to gain a deeper, perhaps more insightful, perspective of the issues that confront us all. I used the occasion to spend some of the enforced confinement in expanding the range of my usual reading material. Amongst the many and various journals and books consumed the one that left the greatest impression was the runaway best-seller Braiding Sweetgrass by the Native American ecologist Mary Wall Kimmerer.

Frazer Henderson - Head of Rail Policy at Transport Scotland talks about the *Rail Services Decarbonisation Action Plan*, announced in July 2020.

His thoughts were published on 15 September on the *Greener Journeys* website.

Within a highly personal narrative she effortlessly weaves plant science and indigenous knowledge, and enables the reader to gain an appreciation of our reciprocal relationship with the rest of the living world. It is not necessarily a book that one would have thought relevant to a transport professional. But it was that reciprocal aspect that resonated, both at an individual and societal level.

And it came to mind again at the end of July when Transport Scotland published the rather more prosaically entitled Rail Services Decarbonisation Action Plan. Now whilst I can't imagine that it, too, will become a best-seller I am nonetheless certain that it will have a profound, direct effect both for individuals and society. And at its heart is reciprocity.

Over time we have ripped open the earth to extract fossil fuels and we've used them in ways that we now realise have delivered harm. We've seen and are seeing the impact on human health and the personal and societal cost of subsequent illnesses. We've seen the harm to the planet manifested in dramatic changes to our climate and ecology. And we're looking at a long term prognosis – if we don't act – that may be beyond the ability of future generations to arrest and reverse.

But by using the readily available resources of light, wind and water – so-called naturally sustainable resources – we can dampen the effects of climate change. We can improve our own health and the well-being of the planet.

By taking these sustainable resources and using them, rather than carbon-dense fuels, to produce electricity we can still provide the energy necessary to deliver a functioning society. In short, decarbonisation – not using carbon – is an act of reciprocity.

Our Action Plan for Rail forms part of a suite of initiatives in Scotland that seek to address the challenges posed by carbon the use of which has begotten climate change. We already have world-leading legislation with net zero emissions targets of greenhouse gases by 2045 and in the transport sector – now the largest single contributor to greenhouse gases – we are implementing low emission zones within our major cities. We intend to phase out new petrol and diesel cars in Scotland by 2032 and decarbonise scheduled flights within Scotland by 2040 with the aim of creating the world's first zero emission aviation region by that date. We are also radically accelerating the deployment of zero emission vehicles within the bus sector as part of our comprehensive response. Indeed, taking action to address the ills of climate change and improve health and well-being are two of four strategic outcomes of our National Transport Strategy.

Our intentions, as set out in the Action Plan, align very much with the findings of the Rail Industry Decarbonisation Taskforce (RSSB July 2019). Accordingly, we intend to pursue cost-effective electrification, coupled with targeted battery and hydrogen technology where these provide a better or more appropriate solution.

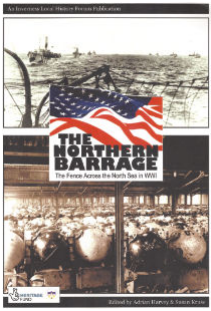
Reducing the cost and impact of physical electrification will be key to the successful delivery of the Plan. Fortunately, there is acknowledgement, right across the rail sector, of the need for greater efficiency during design, development and delivery. The integration of planning and delivery is key to success. There are a host of variables – route, rolling stock, power supply, structures and service operations – which must be addressed by a multi-disciplinary team in a truly integrated manner to ensure a successful, efficient programme. The interplay between variables is complex and challenging. All of this activity requires robust budgetary oversight, ongoing monitoring and continual refinement. Fortunately, a detailed delivery programme, engaging the entire industry in Scotland – known as Team Scotland – in a collaborative approach, is being drawn together under the Programme Delivery Director. It is pleasing to note that progress is underway with design development work already started on a number of electrification schemes to connect and consolidate – efficiently, of course, – the electrification of lines in Scotland's central belt.

Having an Action Plan provides certainty of direction and allows key players to take steps that will stimulate innovation, create new and exciting employment and training opportunities, and help Scotland deliver a genuine sustainable economic recovery from this dispiriting health pandemic. As an example of that approach, Scottish Enterprise, Transport Scotland and others are developing an International Rail Cluster in Scotland. Initially, in the light of prevailing circumstances, this work will begin life as a digital project with a number of events bringing the industry, businesses and academia together online. The expectation is that, in time, post-pandemic, the momentum of a virtual gathering will translate into a physical cluster of businesses and research organisations to support and deliver a world class manufacturing capability in sustainable rail infrastructure and transport.

Our Action Plan is a charter of intent, a statement of action, a proclamation of opportunity and a call to arms. It will also deliver an act of reciprocity.

Frazer Henderson

The Northern Barrage - The Fence Across the North Sea in WWI
Edited by Adrian Harvey & Susan Kruse
Inverness Local History Forum, 2020. £9.99 (www.invernesshistory.co.uk)
ISBN 978-0-9548206-4-0 A4, 120pp



Far North Express readers will already know that the US Navy had a large presence in Inverness and the Invergordon area at the end of WWI for the laying of the Northern Barrage between Orkney and Norway. This was a massive project and needed complex facilities and a large number of personnel.

This book gathers together a large number of contemporary photos, both of the military mine production and laying. The 'social' aspect of so many people suddenly being drafted in to a relatively quiet area is also beautifully shown. Many lives were changed as romances blossomed; around 80 local women got married to US servicemen and went to America once the war was over.

The railway aspect of the operations in Inverness and Dalmore is well covered. This reviewer enjoys the fact that a small batch of locomotives requisitioned from the 'Far South' were designed by William Stroudley, who had previously worked for the Highland Railway in Inverness.

The Northern Barrage gives readers a wonderful opportunity to explore a very particular aspect of local history. It also features FoFNL member Dr Stewart Campbell on P41!

Ian Budd

An update from Scottish Enterprise:

A project aiming to transform the future of the rail industry is underway at the home of Scotland's railway heritage.

A retired ScotRail Class 314 electric set was transported by road from its depot in Glasgow to the Bo'ness & Kinneil Railway where it will be converted to hydrogen-powered - a cleaner, greener alternative to diesel for non-electrified routes.

Hydrogen Train Project looks back to the future

The work is part of a Scottish Enterprise project, in partnership with Transport Scotland and the University of St Andrews' Hydrogen Accelerator, to bring skills for the future of the rail industry into the Scottish supply chain and create opportunities for businesses based here.

It will be carried out by an industry consortium led by hydrogen technology specialists Arcola Energy over the next 11 months with the target of showcasing the train to a global audience attending the COP26 conference in Glasgow in November.

Transport Secretary Michael Matheson said: "This project has the potential to be a game changer for the future of Scotland's rail rolling stock.

"Our Rail Decarbonisation Action Plan sets out to make our passenger railways emissions free by 2035, but to maximise our climate change ambitions, there is also a requirement to look at what we do with retired stock. If we can bring those back into use in a carbon neutral way, there are huge climate gains to be made."

Class 314 at Patterton, 28-05-11 Photo: Pencefn [CC-BY-SA-3.0]

As well as the benefits for Scottish business, the rail industry and the environment, the project will also provide a huge boost to the Bo'ness & Kinneil Railway, a heritage railway, which relies on tourism and has suffered throughout the 2020 Covid lockdowns and restrictions.

The Hydrogen Train Project will attract renewed interest in the visitor attraction, operated by the Scottish Railway Preservation Society (SRPS), as well as providing a direct cash injection via rental of the facilities there.

Scottish Enterprise interim CEO Linda Hanna said: "There are huge opportunities for SMEs in Scotland's rail supply chain from this project and a key step towards our ambitions of creating an international rail cluster here in Scotland.

"The close working of our public sector, academia and business will be a real draw, with the added bonus of our third sector being involved via the the Scottish Railway Preservation Society in Bo'ness. And as well as the project benefiting from the expertise of the volunteers and local contractors, it is fantastic this jewel in our tourism sector will receive a boost at a time when it is so needed."

Steve Humphreys, SRPS Chairman added: "We are delighted to be able to work on this project and the arrival of the Class 314 units on our site at a time when we have had a very difficult year is a welcome and positive step towards our future.

"We have been at the forefront of Scottish railway preservation for 60 years and being part of the future of the railway industry in Scotland makes a fitting project for our Diamond Jubilee in 2021.

"Visitors will once again be able to take a nostalgic steam train journey and visit Scotland's largest railway museum here with us. At the same time, we will be assisting in the development of the future of rail travel in

Scotland"

Dr Ben Todd, CEO of Arcola Energy added: "Hydrogen traction power offers a safe, reliable and zero-carbon alternative for Scotland's rail network. The hydrogen train project is an excellent opportunity for industry leaders in hydrogen, train engineering and safety to collaborate with local technology providers to develop a deployment ready solution."

Professor John Irvine of the University of St Andrews said: "The aim of this project is not just to develop a new low carbon approach that will reduce carbon dioxide emissions and improve air quality, it is also to develop skills and create new supply chain opportunities. If we are to address climate change we need to combine disruptive new technologies like hydrogen trains and offshore wind energy with new capabilities and an agile new workforce, delivering on both climate and employment."

Arcola Energy will develop the technology platform for the train's new powertrain from its Scottish base. They will be supported by train engineering and safety experts Arup and Abbott Risk Consulting to form an integrated delivery team, with AEGIS providing regulatory third-party verification.

Hydrogen Policy Statement

On 22 December 2020, the Scottish Government issued its Hydrogen Policy Statement*.*

This covers all the ways in which hydrogen is to be used as an alternative to carbon-based fuels.

The full document can be viewed on our website, www.fofnl.org.uk/docs/scot-gov/scottish-government-hydrogen-policy-statement.pdf

Here are the key rail-related elements of the statement:

Having successfully demonstrated the technical viability of hydrogen in a range of transport applications, our focus is turning to scaling-up the potential for hydrogen by linking together opportunities across sectors and transport modes and building Scotland's potential for innovation and supply chain growth.

In line with the sustainable travel hierarchy, our priority is managing or reducing demand for travel, and supporting active travel and public transport.

Although often viewed as competing technologies, battery electric and hydrogen systems are in fact complementary and could both become cornerstone technologies for the electrification of transport.

The Scottish Government, Transport Scotland and our enterprise agency partners are already supporting a range of initiatives and projects to build out Scotland's capabilities, with zero emission mobility now a key enterprise theme, and a priority inward investment theme.

Example initiatives and action include:

- launching the Hydrogen Accelerator programme based at the University of St. Andrews. This links academic, public and commercial interests in the development and deployment of hydrogen technologies and provides expert advice and support to the design, development and implementation of transport initiatives across Scotland.
- funding the development of a hydrogen fuel cell rail vehicle to assess the potential for wider use on Scotland's railways.

Rail Sector

Scotland's Rail Services Decarbonisation Action Plan recognises that although, initially, hydrogen fuelled trains are expected to have higher capital and operating costs than diesel trains, the growth and maturity of the market will drive down costs. Recent market engagement with rolling stock manufacturers suggests hydrogen fleets to replace diesel-powered trains are seen as a realistic and affordable option for Scotland in the second half of this decade. Those hydrogen fleets may be used to provide a transitional solution on parts of the network prior to the implementation of electrification infrastructure as well as providing a permanent solution on more remote, less intensively used sections of

the network where full scale electrification is either not economic nor desirable for environmental reasons.

Case Study - Zero Emissions Train Project

The Zero Emissions Train project is an exciting hydrogen-focussed initiative currently being developed by Transport Scotland and Scottish Enterprise in response to the Scottish Government's Programme for Government commitment that; "Where we cannot electrify or it is inappropriate to do so, we will invest in battery powered trains and work with developers of hydrogen fuel cell trains to accelerate their development and deployment through practical trials in Scotland."

The project will convert a withdrawn ScotRail Class 314 electric train over to utilising hydrogen fuel cell (FC) traction. The project aims to demonstrate this technology by operating the train on closed rail network by autumn 2021. The project has six key objectives:

- prove we have the capability to modify an existing item of rolling stock to use hydrogen FC, batteries, control equipment, etc.;
- work with the regulatory bodies to develop the necessary standards and controls for the use of hydrogen FC power on passenger rolling stock;
- inform rail policy on the application of such technology on the Scottish passenger rail network in advance of the decarbonisation target of 2035 for Scotland's passenger rail services;
- demonstrate to Scotland's rail community through practical application the operation of hydrogen FC passenger rolling stock;
- provide the supply chain with the opportunity to develop their skills and knowledge of the application of hydrogen FC technology on passenger rolling stock and hydrogen supply and refuelling infrastructure; and
- provide educational institutions with the opportunity for research and practical application of hydrogen FC technology within the rail industry.

Battery Power

We're planning to carry an update from Alice Gillman of Vivarail in our May magazine. We have wondered whether discontinuous electrification might turn out to be more suitable for the FNL, with battery trains recharging en route. The FNL urgently needs new, comfortable, trains - let's hope Vivarail's work leads in this direction...

Karen Cragg

We are sad to report the passing of Karen Cragg on 7 December 2020, aged only 50. A well-known and much-loved member of the Far North Line team, Karen had been a driver on the line for many years.

She began her railway career as a secondman at Thurso depot. When the depot closed around 1996 she transferred to retail, to run the booking offices at Thurso and Wick. Karen moved on to become a guard and, three years later, a driver. Our erstwhile Secretary, Gavin Sinclair, remembers her well, having first met her at a careers event in his schooldays when he wanted to be a train driver.

Frank Roach, of HITRANS said, "Karen was the face of ScotRail in Caithness. Having run the booking offices in Wick and Thurso she made the great leap to train driving, becoming the first woman driver in a Highland rural depot. She was unflappable, ever optimistic and ever-smiling and dealt superbly with customers and staff. Our family miss her passing through at Rogart."

Station Usage Figures

These figures are April-March so the effects of Covid-19 travel advice and restrictions kicked in and affected the numbers. On the Far North Line several of the stations have such low footfall that percentages become misleading. Combine that with ORR's statement that "Some ticket sales and ticketless travel are not included, which may mean that usage at some stations is underestimated" and it is clear that we shouldn't draw too many specific conclusions from the data.

	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	One Year Change	Two Year Change
Wick	17546	17890	16664	-6.85%	-5.03%
Thurso	39174	39974	39702	-0.68%	1.35%
Georgemas Junction	1320	1576	1570	-0.38%	18.94%
Scotscalder	182	238	232	-2.52%	27.47%
Altnabreac	658	408	232	-43.14%	-64.74%
Forsinard	2210	2530	2866	13.28%	29.68%
Kinbrace	376	510	456	-10.59%	21.28%
Kildonan	206	168	214	27.38%	3.88%
Helmsdale	4636	5044	5086	0.83%	9.71%
Brora	5994	6992	6354	-9.12%	6.01%
Dunrobin Castle	1030	1224	1240	1.31%	20.39%
Golspie	5786	6150	5586	-9.17%	-3.46%
Rogart	1630	1574	1656	5.21%	1.60%
Lairg	5426	6016	6264	4.12%	15.44%
Invershin	438	284	216	-23.94%	-50.68%
Culrain	300	280	312	11.43%	4.00%
Ardgay	7140	6998	6408	-8.43%	-10.25%
Tain	29774	29384	28036	-4.59%	-5.84%
Fearn	5256	4304	4182	-2.83%	-20.43%
Invergordon	28958	28806	27826	-3.40%	-3.91%
Alness	29272	30426	27050	-11.10%	-7.59%
Dingwall	86276	81408	80154	-1.54%	-7.10%
Conon Bridge	15100	17530	18022	2.81%	19.35%
Muir Of Ord	64820	67554	70850	4.88%	9.30%
Beauly	51522	48270	46510	-3.65%	-9.73%
Inverness	1238772	1243338	1214648	-2.31%	-1.95%
Total (excluding Inverness)	405030	405538	397688	-1.94%	-1.81%

The Rosshire Journal *reported the reaction of Kate Forbes MSP, Cabinet Secretary for Finance:*

Growing commuter numbers may be helping drive rail passenger number increases at some Ross villages, local MSP believes.

Kate Forbes was speaking after the Office of Road and Rail (ORR) published its latest annual report into passenger numbers at Scotland's stations.

The figures, which covered the 2019/20 financial year, showed that passenger numbers were up by 2.8 per cent (to 18,022 passengers per year) in Conon Bridge, and 4.9 per cent (to 70,850 passengers) in Muir of Ord.

And Ms Forbes is optimistic of "further improvements" to Ross passenger numbers when "normality returns" after the pandemic. She also believes rises in Conon Bridge and Muir of Ord may be driven by new homes and commuter numbers.

Ms Forbes, said: "It's very encouraging to see more people using the train from Conon Bridge and also Muir of Ord. "There has been a lot of new housing in both areas, so perhaps they are becoming commuter belts for both Inverness and Dingwall.

"I hope that when normality returns, we will see further improvements to the Kyle and Far North lines."

Question S5W-32992: John Finnie, Highlands and Islands, Scottish Green Party, Answered: 17/11/20

To ask the Scottish Government, further to the answer to question S5O-04661 by Mairi Gougeon on 7 October 2020 (Official Report, c. 6), what discussions it has had with the UK Government regarding assisting and promoting the transport of perishable goods by Rail Freight to the continental market.

Michael Matheson, Cabinet Secretary for Transport, Infrastructure and Connectivity: The Scottish Government has discussed the promotion of rail freight with the UK Government, including arrangements for the continuation of channel tunnel freight trains after Brexit, and the importance of electrification of rail links to ports in England to facilitate the efficient and competitive movement of international freight to and from Scotland by rail.

Question S5W-32884: Kenneth Gibson, Cunninghame North, SNP, Answered: 23/11/20

To ask the Scottish Government whether it is considering proposals such as a period of (a) free bus journeys for all, (b) off-peak rail travel all day and (c) free train travel at weekends to encourage people back into the habit of using transport services.

Michael Matheson: Supporting the resurgence of a vibrant public transport network will be a vital step in the COVID recovery. While physical distancing remains in place capacity will continue to be restricted, and the higher Tiers of the Strategic Framework discourage unnecessary use of public transport. Once the pandemic has passed, encouraging a return to public transport will be a key component of the economic recovery, and a key way to help achieve climate change targets. Over the coming months we will be exploring a range of options for the future of all modes of public transport.

Portfolio Question Time - 10 December 2020 - Transport, Infrastructure and Connectivity

Question S5O-04842: Neil Findlay, Lothian, Scottish Labour:

To ask the Scottish Government what its position is regarding free bus travel for all.

Michael Matheson: The Scottish Government will continue to provide free bus travel for older and eligible disabled people through the national concessionary travel scheme. We will also extend free bus travel to all young people aged under 19 who are resident in Scotland as soon as is practicable, in the coming year.

In addition, we are reviewing the options for extending public transport concessions to people who are aged under 26, including assessing the costs and benefits so that we can fully consider financial sustainability. The review will be completed by the end of this month, and findings will be published early in the new year.

Neil Findlay: The Government resisted providing free school meals until political pressure and a social crisis forced its hand. When will the Government accept that the climate crisis is such that a move to free bus travel is not only desirable, but is an absolute necessity?

Michael Matheson: Public transport plays an important part in meeting our net zero emissions commitment, as set out by Parliament in our climate change legislation. That is why we are extending free bus travel to people under 19, and why we are reviewing extension of the existing concessionary scheme for people under 26. It is important to ensure that we continue to encourage people to use public transport. I assure the member that the Government will continue to encourage people to use public transport. The concessionary scheme plays an important part in supporting that.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Bill Kidd has a supplementary question.

Bill Kidd, Glasgow Anniesland, SNP: The cabinet secretary just mentioned that the extension of

concessionary travel to under-19s has been paused, which is basically due to Covid-19. However, can he provide an update on when work on delivering that commitment will begin?

Michael Matheson: Mr Kidd is correct that some of the work around the preparations for introducing concessionary travel for under-19s was paused earlier in the year due to staff in Transport Scotland having to pivot towards dealing with Covid-19 issues. However, that work was restarted in the summer and we have just completed a consultation exercise on the planned draft orders that are associated with the concessionary travel programme. Now that that process has been completed, we are at the final stages of drafting the regulations, which I hope to introduce in Parliament early in the new year, with a view to introducing the scheme later in 2021.

Regular readers will remember this exchange:

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**.

There has *not* been a ten minute journey time saving, and when further questioned by Rhoda Grant, the Minister stated, *"The ten 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)."*

FoFNL has sent a written request to the Minister asking that the parliamentary record be adjusted to reflect the actual facts of this. We are concerned that the incorrect Answer inadvertently appears as a historical fact in the record. We think the original answer was a simple error; however, leaving the record uncorrected would be deliberate. We are awaiting a reply from the Scottish Government.

Delayed Improvements Cause Diversion Problems

> *Sadly, the tragic accident at Carmont in August shone a spotlight on the Scottish Government's short-sighted decision to leave the Highland Main Line, and large parts of the Inverness-Aberdeen route, in their Victorian single-track state. Dualling the A9 between Perth and Inverness is the equivalent to converting the railway to quadruple track. Richard Ardern wrote this letter:*
>
> ***The Press and Journal*** **(Inverness, Highlands, and Islands) 5 September 2020**

The Transport Minister's statement that the railway line south from Aberdeen will not reopen until next month at the earliest (P&J, September 3) is not unexpected. It is a huge task.

The only possible diversionary route is a long one via Inverness on two predominantly single track lines which are currently operating at capacity. The Strategic Transport Projects Review identified these as priority improvements in 2008. Ministers set an initial target of 2017 but this has now slipped to 2030!

Redoubling of the line to Inverurie has been completed, but passing loops west of Keith and south of Pitlochry have not yet been started. It is good that some freight trains are getting through but this is at the expense of cancellation of Inverness to Elgin passenger trains and increased delays to others.

The 2008 plans would also make room for whisky and timber related trains to operate again to and from Moray. These missing loops need to be completed long before 2030.

Richard Ardern, Inverness

The Scottish Government's Infrastructure Investment Plan *was published in draft form on 24 September 2020. In a step showing the level of concern arising from the apparent mismatch between declared policy and actual plans, five Scottish organisations wrote this joint letter to Michael Matheson MSP, Cabinet Secretary for Transport, Infrastructure and Connectivity.*

Tuesday 24 November 2020

Dear Mr Matheson,

Infrastructure Investment Plan

We are writing to express our deep concern regarding the transport spending priorities set out in the draft Infrastructure Investment Plan 2021-22 to 2025-26 published on 24 September 2020.

Surface transport remains one of the largest contributors to climate change in Scotland, responsible for 25% of all emissions. Despite emission reduction goals being in place since 2009, emissions have risen since then. Whilst the declaration of a Climate Emergency has given this issue greater urgency within Government, we have yet to see a shift to the transformational approach that is required.

Historically transport policy in Scotland has had a strong bias towards investing in high-carbon transport infrastructure over more sustainable forms of transport. In light of the Scottish Government's Climate Emergency declaration we would expect the government to shift these priorities towards creating a less carbon-intensive and more sustainable transport system. This would also be in line with the Infrastructure Commission's recommendation to prioritise the Infrastructure Investment Plan against the net zero economy target.

We were therefore extremely troubled to find that the draft Infrastructure Investment Plan has failed to reprioritise transport infrastructure projects in line with emissions targets in any meaningful way. While the plan says it recognises and accepts the Infrastructure Commission's recommendations, it implicitly continues to support Transport Scotland's multi-billion pound road building programme yet contains no new or additional funds for sustainable transport investment.

We do not support the contention that this draft of the Plan will "support and enable an inclusive net zero emissions economy." Instead, we are concerned that it will reinforce existing trends towards road capacity expansion, preventing us from reaching net zero by 2045.

We call on Ministers to reassess the transport spending priorities and individual projects contained in the draft Infrastructure Investment Plan in line with Scotland's climate goals, the Infrastructure Commission's recommendations and the new investment hierarchy contained within the draft Plan. We recognise the uncertainty and disruption caused by the pandemic, but feel that such a review could allow consideration of alternative travel solutions that would bring wider air quality, health and well-being benefits.Without reprioritisation of the investment programme, the investment hierarchy and commitments to sustainable investment will not have the desired impact.

Yours sincerely,

Ian Findlay, Chief Officer, Paths for All

Aedán Smith, Head of Policy and Advocacy, RSPB Scotland

John Lauder, National Director, Sustrans Scotland

Colin Howden, Director, Transform Scotland

Lang Banks, Director, WWF Scotland

The two online Q & A sessions held by Transport Scotland in November as part of the process of deciding future transport plans have illustrated the difficulty the Scottish Government appears to be in over prioritising transport investment. The answers were often lifted from the actual *National Transport Strategy 2 Delivery Plan* which was published in December.

This question:

The security or resilience of the transport network is paramount, because if it fails nobody can use it! Therefore there should be alternative routes, perhaps on different modes, to highly-visited destinations, to ensure that people can still get there.

elicited an assurance about allocation of funds to rail, although missing any mention of improvement projects:

• We will invest over £3.8 billion in the operation, maintenance and sustainable renewal of a high performing rail network for passengers and freight

but this was countered in the same answer by a raft of road projects:

• We will progress delivery of the A9 Dualling programme between Perth and Inverness, and the A96 Dualling programme between Inverness and Aberdeen.

• We will progress the development and statutory authorisation procedures for a number of major trunk road schemes, including the A82 Tarbet to Inverarnan Improvement, A720 Sheriffhall Junction Improvement, A737 Improvements at Beith, A90/A937 Laurencekirk Junction Improvement, A9/A82 Longman Junction Improvement and the A9/A96 Inshes to Smithton scheme

• We will bring forward proposals for a permanent solution to address the A83 Rest and Be Thankful landslip risks

• We will continue to progress the construction phase of the A77 Maybole Bypass and of the A92/A96 Haudagain Improvement

Then in response to:

The Cabinet Secretary has said he wants to see fewer vehicles on the road. Will this be featured as a specific commitment being delivered in the first NTS2 Delivery Plan?

the answer was:

The Delivery Plan sets out that not taking steps to effectively manage demand for car use is no longer an option. We will therefore continue to explore effective options to manage demand.

We will work across government to develop a coordinated package of policy interventions to reduce car kilometres by 20% by 2030.

Although the *National Transport Strategy* is to establish priorities, and projects can be expected to be listed in the *Strategic Transport Projects Review*, it is worrying that the above answers gave such an emphasis on road-building which is contrary to Scottish Government policy of modal shift to rail.

The Government should not forget that there was a reasonable public expectation that the declared Climate Emergency would see really significant investment in rail to permit much greater use for both passenger and freight transferring from roads.

It is certainly controversial that at this time of agreement about the need to move as much freight as possible from road to rail, the DfT has been running a *48 tonne intermodal freight trial: consultation document*. Its preamble says that the increase to 48 tonnes and six axles is only to be considered for use in *intermodal* journeys on limited routes. It must be made clear that there will be no question of allowing these vehicles to be authorised for general use – but environmental campaigners rightly worry that an intermodal dispensation will inexorably lead to an across-the-board 48 tonne limit, as happened with the increase from 38 to 40, then 44 tonnes.

Ian Budd

Railway News

www

Volunteer Award

FoFNL congratulates member Mike Willmot for achieving second place in the UK Community Rail Awards 2020 for outstanding volunteer contribution.

As well as being the driving force behind the extremely successful restoration of Helmsdale Station building, Mike has also been Chairman of the North Staffordshire Community Rail Partnership since 2005.

Stromeferry Plaque

To mark 150 years since the Kyle Line opened as far as Stromeferry, ScotRail has provided a plaque at the station:

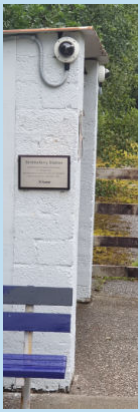
Stromeferry Station

Opened by the Dingwall & Skye Railway

on 19 August 1870

and remained its terminus until the line extended to

Kyle of Lochalsh on 2 November 1897



Delny LX Replacement

Network Rail announced in September that the level crossing at Delny is at last to be replaced by a bridge.

Although the level crossing was upgraded in 2017 from an open crossing to an automatic half barrier, a bridge has long been the ideal solution. Three people were killed in two separate incidents before it was upgraded.

It is hoped that the bridge will be opened by early-2022.

Brora Rail!

Members of the Brora Salt Pans Research Group recently found a length of rail in the vicinity of the Brora 1'8" gauge coal mine system which closed in 1975. The rail looks very similar in height to the track you can see in several old pictures on their Facebook page - www.facebook.com/BroraSaltPans

The picture below shows the rail profile, with the end of a finger for scale.

Out of the Station Window

An unusual view of a Far North Line station featured last Autumn in an art gallery in Linlithgow. The artist Leo du Feu, who was brought up in the town, had ten of his paintings exhibited in the Line Gallery. They included this picture of Helmsdale Station as seen from inside the beautifully restored station building.

Leo has an ongoing project to explore Scotland's rail-accessible landscapes which is supported by ScotRail.

To find out more about his work visit www.leodufeu.co.uk

www

New BTP Chief Constable Appointed

British Transport Police Chief Constable, Paul Crowther CBE, is to retire in February 2021 after 40 years' service in the BTP. The new Chief Constable will be Lucy D'Orsi, currently the Metropolitan Police's Deputy Assistant Commissioner for Specialist Operations.

Ms D'Orsi said: "I am delighted and honoured to be appointed as the next Chief Constable of BTP. I am looking forward to building on the legacy that Paul is handing over and I would like to thank him for his dedication to policing. Whilst policing the nation's capital has given me a wealth of operational experience, I am excited to lead a force that deals with the unique nature of policing Britain's rail, underground and tram network. Working with industry partners and government to keep passengers safe, the railway moving and protect our critical national infrastructure, particularly during these uncertain times, will be very rewarding."

FoFNL hopes that the appointment being from outwith the BTP will not prove a handicap. We also hope that Ms D'Orsi soon adjusts to needing to deal with three governments - a vital benefit of keeping the BTP as a 'national' body, as rail journeys do not respect borders.

Organic Opportunity


Photo: Paul Abell

Another contender has appeared in the race to find environmentally-friendly rail traction. A company called Ultra Light Rail Partners received an initial grant of £350,000 from the UK government's Sustainable Innovation Fund to develop a test vehicle powered by biomethane. It has now received a further grant to develop a larger light rail vehicle, Project BioUltra, which would be able to carry 120 passengers.

Biomethane is produced from a variety of organic waste, including sewage sludge, food waste and animal manure. The material is broken down by bacteria to produce the gas.

Although burning the gas produces carbon, this would have been emitted anyway during its breaking down process. This is quite unlike fossil fuel which had lain undisturbed underground, with the carbon locked away.

The prototype vehicle, shown during a demonstration session at Motorail in Long Marston in July 2020, was based on a Parry People Mover body with a Ford propane-powered engine, converted to use biomethane.

It is envisaged that the technology, combined with a lightweight, and low-cost track system, could be a catalyst in providing feeder services, possibly using re-opened branch lines.

Rights to the photo above were obtained via Today's Railways UK, published by Platform 5

Inverness Airport Station

Inverness Airport Station Planning Application December 2020 www

On land 685 metres south of Inverness Airport, Dalcross:

"Construction of two platform railway station and ancillary infrastructure including: car and cycle parking; bus drop off zone; electric vehicle charging points; waiting shelters; access road improvements; pedestrian and cycle access ramp off C1017; surface water drainage system; landscaping; earthworks for track loop; associated works to remove Overbridge 87; works to close the U5409 and associated pedestrian and cycle rampy off U5409; compound; layby; railway link; delivery of turning heads to facilitate closure of the Dalcross/Petty Level Crossing; new footbridge crossing at Woodend; and change of use of land to operational railway land".

FoFNL wrote to Highland Council on 2 January giving general support to this application.

The station will be called "Inverness Airport Station" and it is 0.8 miles from the airport terminal building. HITRANS and Highlands and Islands Airports Ltd (HIAL) are investigating provision of a bus/taxi link.

In the opposite direction it will be a similar distance from the rapidly expanding new town of Tornagrain being built to the south of the A96T. There will be parking for 64 vehicles, a bus stop and provision for cyclists. Car park charging is to be discussed and agreed with ScotRail.

The station will have two platforms and thus the much-needed passing loop will be achieved to break up the 15 mile single track section between Inverness and Nairn. It will be 7 miles to Inverness and all but the short stretch of this to the Petty level crossing used to be on double track formation.

The double track will stretch from the vicinity of the helicopter base through the station as far west as the Woodend private crossing. Thus it will only be around 1,000m long. [FoFNL would have preferred to see it much longer: as far as the Norbord siding at Morayhill at the very least to increase operational flexibility. (The Norbord freight siding is not part of this application and is to be progressed independently).

It is hoped to commence construction in the late summer of 2021 and to have the station commissioned by December 2022. The increase in journey time which will result has already been offset by the reduction achieved from the opening of the new integrated Forres station and loop.

Richard Ardern

Kintore Station Reopens

Inverness-bound Inter7City train on 15 October 2020. Photo: Network Rail

[Below left] Photo: Wkimedia CC-BY-SA-4.0

The town of Kintore, 13 miles by rail from Aberdeen, with a population of nearly 5000, has finally been reconnected to the rail network 56 years after the station was closed. Trains began serving the town again on 15 October 2020 with a timetable of 28 trains each day, and a journey time to Aberdeen of less than 20 minutes.

The reopening was part of phase 1 of the A2I programme of works which has seen double tracking of 16 miles of the Aberdeen to Inverness route as far as Inverurie.

The station is on a different site from the original, and has a car park which boasts 24 charging points among its 168 parking spaces to encourage park-and-ride commuting from villages in the area.

A nice touch has been the refurbishment and restoration of some items from the original station. These include 'Kintore' signs, which have spent the intervening years in a barn, and an original bench which was spotted at an auction and bought by Aberdeenshire Council and Nestrans.

Ian Budd

[Above] Photo: Network Rail

Branchline Society railtour in the summer after closure, 5 June 1965.

Photo: Great North of Scotland Railway Association Collection

This article, by Andrew Jarvis, managing director of First Bus in Scotland, appeared in The Scotsman *on 8 October 2020.*

They say that many hands make light work. But that's not what we've found to be the case in the transport industry. Especially when those hands are juggling countless other responsibilities — bus networks and transport strategies are too easily pushed to the bottom of a to-do list.

Build a bus network that will tempt commuters to use public transport - Andrew Jarvis

This pandemic has given us time to reflect on the world that once was — the transport successes we've seen in recent years, as well as ambitious strategies and policies which have been met with limited action. As we look back, one thing is clear: the fewer controlling minds involved, the more likely we are to make progress.

The Queensferry Crossing, the M80, the M74 and the reinstatement or extension of rail lines were all achieved with a national effort — not through councils being able to find the time and resource needed to prioritise transport. Whilst it's great that authorities can decide where they spend their money, the reality is that they're strapped for cash and have many pressing priorities.

It's not easy to persuade councillors and numerous officers across the country, who have too much on their plate, to focus on the action needed. Our current system, whereby the government hands councils money to deliver certain services, just isn't working and it's making it very difficult to deliver meaningful change at a time when we need it most — and when we have the public on side after experiencing how pleasant their local areas can be, free from congestion.

The prism of Covid risks taking our attention away from achieving the oversight we need. Covid has undoubtedly dominated the global agenda in recent months, but there is scope to use it as an opportunity to pivot our approach to transport infrastructure and strategy.

We've got to get the zeitgeist right: we need to worry about protecting the population from this virus, but we can't turn our backs on seriously rethinking the way we live in our towns and cities.

We must work towards a greener future, or we risk coming back to decimated town centres and congested streets, with all the pollution, social inequality and negative economic impact that comes with that.

There's no denying that First Bus had its best punctuality and reliability ever during lockdown; traffic levels were so low and very predictable. But already, we're seeing a significant increase in cars on the roads with some hotspots hitting pre-covid congestion levels.

When one thing so many of us professed not to have missed during lockdown was the daily commute, it seems absurd not to take action, while we have the chance to finally build a bus network which will take people out of their cars and onto public transport.

Imagine ridding ourselves of that wasted hour sat in traffic among other frustrated commuters. Or banishing the feeling of injustice and stress as you find yourself half an hour late because you left home five minutes later than usual, to a distant memory.

Despite none of us wanting to go back to congested roads and polluted streets, here we are, reverting to type, with a core reason being that, for some, there remains no viable alternative.

To achieve the change we need, we require bigger-picture thinking, greater attention to the job in hand and a single, collective approach. No one wants to be inconvenienced. No one wants to pay more. But progress doesn't come free — or at all if it's about keeping the "nimbys" happy.

When Ken Livingstone brought in the congestion charge in central London, he was

met with outrage. And yet, everyone's seen the good it's done, and people saw something in his leadership — a second term in office was the reward for his vision.

Transport planning needs to be put back into the heart of what we do. Our policies, strategies and green travel plans will sit on the shelves and gather dust unless we bring into force a mind to make them happen.

Long-term decisions made by government, such as investing in the trains, should be coupled with a plan for buses, coaches and trams. It's important that we look at the full picture of transport planning to achieve a network that's efficient, good value, connected and meets demand.

As the Scottish Government is currently recasting its strategic transport vision, we find that buses still barely get a mention.

First Bus in Glasgow has more passenger journeys than ScotRail, but our bus network in the city is not considered strategic. It's a strange world we live in when the long-distance, white-collar commuters matter more than the blue-collar citizens needing to get from A to B locally.

Of course, in terms of passenger distance, trains do come out on top. But we must consider volume, and buses carry about four times the number of people. Bus travel needs to be at the top of Transport Scotland's strategic plan and we need a national vision to benefit the future of these most-relied-upon routes and their connecting links. Commuters travel across many local authorities, daily, to get to work — so why do we restrict transport planning for buses largely to within council boundaries? Planning within these boundaries might work for education, social care and bin collections — but these physical limitations shouldn't have anything to do with transport.

Regional partnerships or groupings for transport planning, like the emerging Forth Valley Partnership, seem a more sensible way to move forward, particularly in conjunction with the City Region Deal focus.

When it comes to transport planning, many hands can make light work if we're referring to Scots as a whole, each making a small decision to change for the greater good.

But to help that happen, we need one mind, or one body, to look at the bigger picture and keep the wheels turning.

It's useful, and quite thought-provoking, to see the transport environment through the eyes of a bus operator. The Far North Line needs to be easily reachable by bus if more people are going to be tempted out of their cars, but currently there is no way of making this happen.

Transport Scotland's *Bus Policy and Guidance* makes no mention of co-ordinating with other means of transport. It states that:

The majority of bus services in Scotland are operated on a commercial basis by private bus companies. Provided that an operator registers a service with the Office of the Traffic Commissioner they can operate any route they wish, to any timetable.

Local transport authorities can provide subsidy for services that are not provided on a commercial basis, but this is entirely a matter for the local authority.

As long as an operator fills in the correct forms they will be given permission to start a service. The only limitation appears to be that they must not breach competition laws.

It's difficult to see how TS could have a cohesive transport policy involving buses, as it undoubtedly should, with there being no possibility of placing an obligation on any commercial operator to provide, or continue to provide, a service.

In Scotland, the new Inverness Travel Hub will be very unusual in bringing a bus station and a railway station into close proximity. Yet potential passengers elsewhere, whose journeys would involve elements of both, may continue to be deterred by having to trudge through the rain with heavy luggage. A cohesive, stable, public transport network needs to exist, but cannot under the present system.

Ian Budd

Kyle Campaign 50 Years On

Having escaped the 'Beeching Axe' in 1963, the Kyle Line was slated for closure again in 1971 by the UK Government, which planned to withdraw the grant subsidy by the end of 1973. This article in The Scotsman*, published on 3 February 1971 gives a flavour of the vigorous campaign which followed.*

Bumping over cattle grids, lurching round sharp bends and jolting to a halt when confronted with oncoming traffic or livestock on a single-track road, are discomforts unlikely to appeal to the travelling public or even attract passengers to any bus service to be operated between Dingwall and Kyle of Lochalsh if the rail link between the two terminals is closed this year.

Forty-five miles of the tortuous 69-mile journey via Garve, Achnasheen, Strathcarron and Achmore is over single track roads barely wide enough to accommodate the modern coaches operated today, and even the odd sheep nibbling at a succulent grass tussock at the road's edge, will bring a warning hoot, for the two cannot share this narrow highway.

The coach is held up on a single track section of the road while a car is lifted out of a ditch after skidding at a narrow bridge.

Heavy snow shrouds the route at Lochluichart.

The experimental journey sponsored for observers by Ross and Cromarty County Council in a 41-seater chartered coach this week, provided convincing evidence that the smoothness and convenience of rail travel cannot be equalled by buses over such a route.

Amazingly, the trial bus arrived at Kyle only 30 minutes late after negotiating sheep, being briefly halted on an icy hill over the new Strome Ferry bypass, stopping to help remove a car which had plunged broadside into a ditch and making scheduled stops at proposed passenger pick up points.

TUCCS [Transport Users' Consultative Committee Scotland] hearing to be held in Inverness on 17 February to hear some of the evidence from 541 bodies and individuals who have lodged objections to the line's proposed closure.

The line's existence still seemed fragile, even after it had been reprieved for a second time in 1974, so a group led by Tom Campbell formed The Friends of the Kyle Line in 1995. FOTKL has helped to ensure the current success of the line.

Caroline Travels North

***Caroline* and 37421 at Garve on 16 October 2020**
Photo: Peter Moore

At the beginning of October the Far North and Kyle lines received a visit from a particularly interesting vehicle. I'm not normally wishing to refer to railway vehicles as 'She' but in this case it seems rude not to.

Her name is *Caroline* and she has a notable history. She was built in 1958 as a buffet car for one of the 'Hastings' DEMU (diesel-electric multiple unit) sets.

She has the noticeably narrow profile which was needed for trains on that line, due to the restricted width in the eight tunnels between Hastings and Tonbridge. The original contractors in the 1850s had cheated the South Eastern Railway by building the tunnels with insufficient lining. Soon after opening brickwork began to collapse and the remedial work narrowed the tunnels by 18".

Caroline now travels the entire UK rail system as an inspection saloon, and in 2008 was designated by the Railway Heritage Committee to be preserved when Network Rail no longer needs her.

Caroline's timeline is more interesting than the average railway carriage:

- 1963: buffet services on Hastings line reduced, so withdrawn
- 1969: converted, and fitted with push-pull train controls, to become Southern Region General Manager's Saloon
- 1981: used in the honeymoon special of the Prince of Wales and Lady Diana Spencer from Waterloo to Romsey
- 1982: transported Pope John Paul II from Gatwick Airport to London Victoria
- 1992: became first standard gauge passenger service into the Channel Tunnel, propelled by a Class 73 - see rear cover photo.

Readers will be familiar with another rail vehicle which has carried even more famous dignitaries - '*Dunrobin*', the Duke of Sutherland's personal locomotive [FNE 74 www.fofnl.org.uk/fne/2018/FNE-74-D.pdf]

Ian Budd

***Caroline* in Hastings on 18 July 1985**
Photo: Sandy Colley

WWW

A V4 at Thurso?

Although FoFNL is not a railway enthusiasts' organisation it would be true to say that many of us are pretty enthusiastic about anything railway-related.

No surprise then that this writer was delighted to hear about the project to build, from scratch, a steam locomotive of a kind which missed out on being preserved and is eminently suitable to run on the Far North Line.

Add to that the fact that the said locomotive is to the last design of the L.N.E.R.'s famous Chief Mechanical Engineer, Edinburgh-born Sir Nigel Gresley. Sir Nigel was responsible, whilst employed by one of the L.N.E.R. constituent companies, the Great Northern Railway, for the design of the class (later A3) which included *Flying Scotsman*. He then went on to design another class of 'Pacific' locomotives, developed from the A3 design, which became the A4 and included *Mallard*, which still holds the world speed record for a steam locomotive - 126 mph, set an astonishing 82 years ago!

The V4 will be the third new-build steam locomotive to emerge from the A1 Steam Locomotive Trust (A1SLT) works in Darlington. The first, *Tornado*, an A1, has already travelled north as far as Brora, and the second (this writer's all-time favourite locomotive design), a P2 2-8-2, originally designed by Gresley for the difficult Edinburgh-Aberdeen route, is well under way.

An article in last summer's A1SLT magazine by Graeme Bunker-James, entitled, *"Why a V4 opens up more options"*, gives this view of the prospects for the V4:

The V4 is a much smaller locomotive (than Tornado*) with an axle weight of only 17 tonnes bringing a Route Availability of RA5.*

Why does this matter? Well if we look at Scotland it's fair to say Tornado *has been further than any LNER Pacific before. In 2015 when the locomotive ran to Brora it was a unique event, and probably not one to be repeated. The locomotive was easily the heaviest vehicle ever to run over the route and was limited to 35mph!*

Whilst the P2 is slightly better than the A1, being an RA8 locomotive with a 20 tonne axle weight, both the large engines have limits on where they can go due to their overall weight approaching 170 tonnes. The V4 weighs 114 tonnes so represents a very different level of challenge for the civil engineer to be comfortable with.

The V4 therefore opens up Scotland for the Trust beyond the Central Belt routes and north to Inverness via Perth and either Aviemore or Aberdeen. It will be able to go on these routes, but also across the Tay Bridge, sadly no longer cleared for the large engines. It can go north to Wick and Thurso on the Far North Line and visit the stunningly scenic route to Kyle of Lochalsh.

The only two members of the class were built in 1941. The first was named *Bantam Cock* and the second was unnamed but affectionately known as *Bantam Hen*. Both V4s were scrapped in 1957 at 16 years of age.

We think it's no contest - the new V4, No. 3403, has to be named *Bantam Chick*!

Ian Budd

Top: Colourised and renumbered to show what the new V4 will look like - originally No. 3401 Bantam Cock in ex-works condition in 1941 at an unrecorded location, but likely to be Doncaster works.

If reading this has inspired you to help by contributing, head to **www.v4steam.com** for the latest news.

Although there is currently no specific appeal open for No. 3403, any donations made towards it will be ring-fenced for the V4.

A1SLT's next step will be to launch *The Founder's Club* to fund the early stages of the work. More announcements will be made over the next few months as the project builds up steam.

enquiries@v4steam.com

Far North Memories

FoFNL member, Janet Mackenzie, sent us these nostalgic shots that she took in the early 1960s. Janet writes:

"The train in the snow was taken on my journey at the end of January 1960 up to Thurso to start my new job at Dounreay. I had only been up to Dounreay once, for the job interview (a free trip or I wouldn't have gone), and had been amazed at the journey. This time I made sure I had my camera with me. The photo was taken by poking the camera out of the little opening top sections of the window in the compartment. This meant a whole lot of freezing cold air coming in to the compartment, but the reverend gentleman sitting opposite, the only other person in it, nobly put up with it. I think he was amused at how excited I was!"

Janet has no information about the goods train on the line by the single track road down to Helmsdale. It looks as though some ballast wagons were included in an otherwise fairly typical formation. "I think it must have been an unusual sight even in summer 1963 when this photo was taken, or I wouldn't have begged Jill who was driving us to stop so I could get the shot."

www

Surprising Scenes

Photo: Peter Moore

73969 arriving at Tain on 4 November 2020. Class 73s were originally built for use on the third-rail lines of Southern England. They were elecric locomotives with an additional low-powered diesel engine for use on non-electrified track, e.g. depots.

Some of the class have been rebuilt as diesel locomotives and are used to haul the Caledonian Sleeper services over non-electrified sections of the route.

Although now familiar in Inverness, the driver-training and route-learning expedition shown here saw this locomotive reach as far north as Georgemas Junction.

Work took place on 7 and 8 December on the HML. In a very unusual railway view four engineers' trains have pulled up together at Cradlehall, each drawn by a Class 66. From the front: 66305, 66754 and then, based on earlier observations, 66543 and 66126.

Photo: Sandy Colley