

THE FRIENDS OF THE FAR NORTH LINE

Cairdean Na Loine Tuath

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The campaign group for rail north of Inverness, lobbying for improved services for the local user, tourist and freight customers.

To Office of Rail Regulation

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Network Rail's Strategic Business Plan for Scotland 2013

1) FoFNL (established 1994) is the Rail User Group for the North of Scotland. It is concerned with the three lines which converge on Inverness from Perth; from Aberdeen; and from Wick and with integration of passenger and freight services between all three.

2) Inverness is the only Scottish city dependent on rail lines which are single track for long distances. We welcomed the Scottish Government's December 2008 intention to prioritise major upgrades to the Highland Main Line (HML) and the Inverness to Aberdeen line (InvAb). The target dates are not being met and we are concerned that momentum has been lost.

3) Both schemes are to deliver hourly end to end passenger train frequencies and greater capacity and faster line speeds to make the railway journey times competitive with road journeys for both passengers and, importantly, for freight too.

4) We trust that the £280M earmarked for what is now to be Phase 1 of the InvAb improvements will ensure that this is delivered in full within CP5 and that measures will be put in hand during CP5 on the design work for the remaining work to be delivered in CP6.

5) We trust that the £121M earmarked for reinstating loops and providing significant line speed improvements (not least for freight) on the HML will ensure that the hourly passenger service frequency will be delivered during CP5 together with headline journey times of below 3 hours between Inverness and both Glasgow and Edinburgh.

6) Both the InvAb and HML lines are in danger of losing competitiveness as the A96 and A9 roads are being improved. Currently, InvAb is in danger of losing the edge it has long held over the A96; the HML is in danger of losing a position of equality with the buses to Glasgow; and it is not currently competitive to Edinburgh.

7) The crucial thing as well as speed is capacity. The single tracks with insufficient passing loops/ dynamic loops/ double track sections inflict horrendous operating handicaps and time penalties. This capacity is particularly needed for freight.

8) Fuel oil supply is in a tremendously precarious position due to Middle East politics and the North Sea fields being increasingly controlled from, and supplies contracted to, overseas countries. This suggests a major shift from road to rail for freight may well have to happen to conserve stocks and minimise delivery costs. Both the InvAb and HML lines need to gain significantly much more capacity urgently for this. The Northern and Eastern Highlands are dangerously dependent on the A9 and A96 roads. A rail alternative is vital.

Richard Ardern for FoFNL Committee