

**Highland wide Local Development Plan - Main Issues Report
Consultation Summary and Actions Sheet**

Reference Number:	HWLDP-MIR-152
Organisation/Individual:	Friends of the Far North Line (Gavin Sinclair)

Action:

Immediate Response Required	
Meeting required with Respondent	
Issue for Area Local Development Plan	
Further Information Required	
Other (Please Specify)	

If no box ticked - issues raised will be dealt with in preparation of the Proposed Plan.

Issues Raised in Response:

Purpose of Main Issues Report	
NPF2 for Scotland	
Vision for the Highlands	
Inverness and A96	
The A96 Corridor	
Phasing of Development	
Developer Contributions	
East Inverness	
Nairn	
Tornagrain	
Smaller Settlements in A96	
Caithness and North Sutherland	
Easter Ross and Nigg	x
Development of Local Centres	
Wider Countryside and Fragile Areas	
Population and Housing	
Housing in the Countryside	
Affordable Housing	
Planning for an Ageing Population	
Gypsies/Travellers	
Retailing	
Developer Contributions	
Natural, Built and Cultural Heritage	

Previously used Land	
Wild Land	
Water Environment	
Renewable Energy	
Flooding	
Waste Management	
Air Quality	
Sustainable Design	
Business and Industrial Land	
Accessibility and Transport	x
Agricultural Land	
Subdivision of Existing Crofts	
Allocation of Inbye Land	
New Crofting Township	
Small Scale New Crofts	
Coastal Development	
Forestry and Woodland	
Minerals	
Open Space and Physical Activity	
Access to the Outdoors	
Comments on Consultation Process (+ve)	
Comments on Consultation Process (-ve)	

Key:

Background	Spatial Strategy	Policy Options	Consultation
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Notes:

Should be further consideration of rail in the HWLDP
 Provide double track capacity
 Infrastructure needed to permit significant increase in rail freight
 Accessibility and transport should have greater emphasis on sustainable modes of transport

Action Sheet Completed by:	SH
Date:	9/12/09

THE FRIENDS OF THE FAR NORTH LINE

Cairdean Na Loine Tuath

President: John Thurso MP

Convener: John Brandon; Treasurer: David Start; Secretary: Gavin Sinclair

Address for correspondence: FoFNL, Findon Mills, Culbokie, Dingwall, Ross & Cromarty
IV7 8JJ

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

5 November 2009

Director of Planning & Development
The Highland Council
INVERNESS

Dear Sir,

HIGHLAND WIDE LOCAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN (HWLDP)

FoFNL was established in 1994, has 170 members, and keeps an eye on the Highland Main Line to Perth (HML) and the Inverness to Aberdeen line (INVAB) as well as on the Far North Line (FNL). This response to the HWLDP was approved at a FoFNL committee meeting in Inverness on 31 October.

FoFNL expects there to be a massive modal shift to rail, especially for freight, within the next 10 to 20 years due to the peak oil scenario, rising oil prices and increased scarcity together with other wide-ranging anti climate change measures which the world will be forced to adopt.

FoFNL is most concerned that, presumably because HC is not largely responsible for rail development funding (with the exception of former Hitrans money for eg Conon station re-opening), rail does not receive adequate consideration or mention in the HWLDP draft plan.

STRATEGIC PROJECTS

The Scottish Government's 2008 Strategic Transport Projects Review (STPR) priority improvements to the Inverness- Aberdeen railway line are not mentioned at all in your pages about the important A96 corridor. We are disappointed that these important rail improvements are not programmed for completion until 2016 and are neither fully designed nor funded yet, but they certainly come within the scope and timescale of the HWLDP.

We would ask HC to actively lobby for the long awaited Dalcross station and passing loop with park and ride to be completed well before 2016. The projected half hourly

service frequency of trains could then be introduced, especially at commuter times, to ease some of the pressure on the A96 road and on parking in the wider Inverness area.

A new metro service could be a longer term project along the north (or railway) side of the Inverness Millburn Road corridor crossing over the A96T to serve the Retail and Business Park and extending to Culloden, Balloch or further as required.

EASING ROAD CONGESTION IN AND AROUND INVERNESS

Similarly to the north of Inverness, we would hope that HC will actively support our bid to have line capacity between Inverness and Muir of Ord substantially increased so that there may be more commuter trains in both directions and additional services throughout the day. The way to achieve this is through the replacement of the former double track to create a passing loop between Lentrane and Clunes (Kirkhill).

A copy of our 2009 paper "**Strengthening the Far North Line**" which makes the case for this is enclosed herewith and may also be found in our September 2009 Newsletter.

It is unfortunate that the timescale will probably be too short to have this loop operational in time to help with the 2011 Kessock Bridge resurfacing works which will inevitably increase the road congestion levels substantially above the very serious congestion already being experienced at peak times. The railway should still be able to help during this period by providing longer trains, but not with the frequency which would be desirable.

PROVIDING DOUBLE TRACK CAPACITY

This highlights the disadvantages suffered by all the single track rail routes in the Highlands. Capacity is seriously limited by the distances between passing loops. We would ask HC to lobby Government and Transport Scotland (TS) to address this with a continuing programme of doubling stretches of line particularly between Perth and Inverness and also between Inverness and Dalriada Airport. A programme similar to the old Crofter Counties Roads Programme is required.

The STPR priority schemes for the HML and INVAB lines include some line speed improvements. The Far North Line has seen line speeds reduced over the last five years increasing passenger train journey times between Inverness and Wick by 25 minutes. Continuing effort needs to be made to reduce journey times on the FNL.

INFRASTRUCTURE TO PERMIT SIGNIFICANT INCREASE IN RAIL FREIGHT

Significant stretches of double track together with longer loops will permit the substantial increase in freight train numbers which will probably happen quite suddenly due to one oil crisis or another. We need to conserve the oil to permit necessary goods

to be taken onwards to those parts of the Highlands which are not close to a railway line.

The other requirement is for a sufficient number of rail freight terminals in strategically appropriate locations with good access out on to the road network for onward transshipment of rail freight. This is a crucial land use decision which needs to be part of the Development Plan.

CRITIQUE OF YOUR DRAFT GROWTH STRATEGY PROPOSALS

Your Dispersed Growth Option map on p14 shows the possibility of reopening Clunes station as a "Commuter Rail Link." Evanton is also shown as an area for "settlement growth." It is not clear whether there is a potential station reopening shown under the graphics? Evanton provides a good illustration of a nodal point that could be developed for both rail passengers and freight using the formerly proposed Deephaven rail freight terminal. Invergordon is another place where land for rail freight access should be safeguarded beside the harbour.

This likely scenario of substantial increases in the traffic carried by rail also suggests that **Corridors for Future Rail Use** should be identified. One of these would be for a railway line from either Kildary or Nigg Station down to the jetties at the Nigg terminal. Such rail freight developments mean that the Council should also be lobbying for the extension of the improved freight loading gauge, from its present northerly limit of Elgin, through to Inverness, Invergordon and Nigg.

FoFNL has already made representations to the HC in the context of the Sutherland local plan to ensure that a transport corridor is protected from the Dornoch Bridge to Golspie to permit the future construction of a rail cut-off to serve Dornoch and shorten the route to Caithness. In the context of substantially increased rail traffic (particularly freight) there will be a need to reinstate many of the former passing loops between Inverness and Wick and the Dornoch line and the Lairg line taken together could provide a long loop or effectively double track.

Georgemas would be another node to develop for rail freight use in conjunction with a new curve to provide direct access to Thurso and a reopened passenger station at Halkirk.

STRENGTHENING YOUR ACCESSIBILITY AND TRANSPORT PROPOSALS

The section of the consultation document entitled "Accessibility and Transport" linked to Question 28b should be considerably strengthened in the light of the above. We consider that merely to say
"Improving the rail... routes in the area"
and

"Highlighting the opportunities for improved freight transport throughout the area, including the use of rail..."
is seriously insufficient.

We therefore do not agree with your preferred option.

FoFNL believes it should be strengthened with a bullet point which is all about rail which, as a minimum, might read something like

"* Proactively seek significant rail passenger and freight improvements with appropriate new infrastructure located throughout the region."

We also consider that the existing bullet point 4 should be strengthened to read
* place an emphasis ***on the more sustainable modes of transport and*** on the reduction of emissions and promoting the use of cleaner fuels"

In this context, it is to be hoped that HC is in favour of the Scottish Government's aspiration to electrify the railway from Perth to Inverness by 2030.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, please include rail options in much greater detail in your plan so that they are always considered and promoted along side other possible solutions in all of Highland Council's deliberations on land use planning, development and actual construction of facilities to benefit the economy and people of the Highlands and our vital links with the rest of the UK.

We trust that our ideas may be incorporated in to the published plan and look forward to working with you in any way we can. If you wish any further information or clarification please contact the undersigned.

Yours faithfully,



R J Ardern
Committee Member FoFNL
26A Southside Road
INVERNESS
IV2 3BG.

Encl: Strengthening the Far North Line. (FoFNL 2009)



The Friends of the Far North Line

Cairdean Na Loine Tuath

Strengthening the Far North Line

The Far North Line (FNL) from Inverness to Thurso and Wick (with a branch from Dingwall to Kyle of Lochalsh) has seen significant passenger growth in the four years from 2005. The Rail Users Group, Friends of the Far North Line, wishes to see certain infrastructure improvements to improve reliability and maintain passenger confidence and convenience. This paper considers the requirement for a passing loop between Lentrán and Clunes some 7 miles out from Inverness.

The aim is to reinstate a 1.75 mile dynamic crossing loop on a single line currently operating at capacity at busy times of the day.

- **This will greatly improve the robustness of services north of Inverness.**
- **It will allow expansion of services particularly at commuting times.**
- **It will help to ease the serious road congestion and parking problems which have become acute in recent years.**
- **It will make good sense to tie this in with a signalling upgrade which is now due.**

End to end timings between Inverness and Wick have been extended by some 25 minutes since June 2005 making rail services much less competitive with road journeys. On a 175 mile railway with few passing loops this major deceleration has had the effect of making it much more difficult to dovetail services to fit in with onward rail connections at Inverness and with boat connections at Thurso for Scrabster and Orkney. The on-time running of services is crucial to facilitating the crossing of trains at these infrequent loops. Indeed, it can be shown that, in the current May 2009 timetable, late running of the 07.06 from Glasgow to Inverness can affect crucial crossings on FNL trains at Invergordon, Forsinard and Ardgay such that the delays can feed all the way through the day to affect the 16.56 Inverness – Edinburgh that same evening.

The longest section between loops is the 35 minutes taken to cover the single line between Helmsdale and Forsinard. More crucially, the heaviest trafficked section is the 20 minutes of single line between Inverness and Muir of Ord. This carries up to 14 daily passenger services each way. They are 4 to Wick, 4 to Kyle and another 4 northbound and 6 southbound local Invernet services terminating at Dingwall, Invergordon, Tain or Ardgay. On Friday and Saturday nights there is an additional Tain terminator. There are also paths for freight and for charter trains.

One mile out from Inverness is the Clachnaharry swing bridge over the Caledonian Canal with a speed restriction of 10 mph. The following 6 miles to Clunes (for Kirkhill) used to be double track until singled in the 1960s. Sadly, a new bridge was built in the 1970s to carry the line over the old A9 (now the A862) 5.25 miles out at Phopachy and this was only made wide enough for a single track. While it is much easier to reinstate loops or double track where a double track formation still exists, this narrow bridge now presents a costly impediment.

For that reason, FoFNL is suggesting that the replacement loop should extend only for the 1.75 miles from Lentrán to Clunes. This is conveniently in the middle of the time frame from Inverness to Muir given the speed constraints of the Clachnaharry

swing bridge and of the Beauly station stop. Helpfully, Clunes currently has some signalling infrastructure as it is an Intermediate Block Post.

The convenience of a loop on this section is exemplified by comparison with the Highland Main Line (HML). Here there are 7 mile long double track sections at each end from Inverness to Culloden Moor and from Perth to Stanley. They give much greater flexibility and robustness to the timetable, allowing crossings to be scheduled on those sections. Also, they are particularly important at times of late running because they allow an outgoing service to start out without having to wait for the late incoming service to reach the terminus. Outgoing passengers are far less likely to be inconvenienced by late running and missed connections further on in their journey.

These HML double track sections permit fast running over their seven mile lengths. In the case of the FNL, the distance to the Muir is 12.75 miles and includes the 10 mph permanent speed restriction over the canal swing bridge at Clachnaharry and a significantly lower line speed throughout. Timings are generally of 20 minutes to cover that section inclusive of the Beauly stop. Thus, there can be a very long delay for one of the trains when out of course running occurs. In extremis this can be a 40 minutes delay.

To avoid further delays to other trains at subsequent crossing points (which can put the whole timetable out of joint for the rest of the day) it is common to let the outgoing service from Inverness have priority. This causes major inconvenience to southbound passengers seeking to connect with Perth (for Edinburgh or Glasgow) or Aberdeen trains at Inverness. Connections are often lost and other connections further down the line eg at Edinburgh are lost also.

One example will suffice. If the 06.20 from Wick (WCK), due to arrive in Inverness (INV) at 10.35, is late it would potentially delay the 10.38 INV-WCK. If the 06.20 is more than 10 minutes late it is usually held at Muir of Ord (MOO) or Dingwall (DIN) and the 10.38 is allowed to proceed. The problem continues because once the 10.38 has cleared MOO and the line to Inverness is free, the 11.01 INV-KYL (Kyle) is ready to start. Therefore, the unlucky 06.20 is often held at MOO until 11.20 and will be more than an hour late arriving in Inverness, all because it was 10 minutes or more late north of MOO.

This example graphically illustrates the inflexibility of that long section from INV-MOO. With a loop between Lentrane and Clunes, a more than 10 to 20 minutes lateness by the 06.20 from Wick need only result in a 20 minute late arrival in Inverness and no knock on delay to the 11.01 train to Kyle. Connecting passengers should be able to catch the 10.58 to Aberdeen and just might catch the 10.47 to Edinburgh if it could be held by 10 minutes.

The next train to Edinburgh and Glasgow is not until 12.47. Thus a 10 minute plus delay on the FNL can currently result in a delay of 2 hours in reaching stations south of Inverness. What was already an 8 hour journey from Wick to Edinburgh becomes a 10 hour journey. This is not the sort of scenario which would encourage passengers to trust the train ever again!

For this reason, ScotRail will on occasion transport delayed passengers onwards by taxi or bus at considerable extra expense. It happens also in the opposite direction. Because of the critical requirement to reach scheduled crossing loops on time, the northbound trains will often leave Inverness on time even when a late running connecting train from the Perth or Aberdeen lines is

only a few minutes away. Again, taxis or buses are used to convey passengers onwards to Kyle and Wick line stations. In the case of the latter, because of the more direct route by road, it is sometimes possible to catch up with the Wick trains at Invergordon or Golspie.

The "flighting" of departures northbound from Inverness which we saw at 10.38 and 11.01 happens again with the 13.32 to Kyle and the 13.59 to Wick in order to provide connections from the south. These connection times are very tight, namely 9 minutes in to the 10.38 and only 5 minutes in to the 13.32. Again due to the long section from Inverness to Muir of Ord, the 13.32 and the 13.59 have to depart on time, otherwise the 12.03 from Kyle, which is crossed at Dingwall and Muir of Ord respectively, would be delayed and its passengers might lose their 14 minute connection at Inverness in to the 14.51 to Glasgow.

The long single line sections of 12,12,13,13,24,21 and 14 miles on the FNL and of 12,16,18 and 18 miles on the Kyle line exert a major constraint, very seriously minimising the flexibility of operating these lines north and west of Dingwall. The section between Inverness and Dingwall is crucial and common to both. It is operating at capacity at certain times of day.

Commuter pressures on the A9 Kessock Bridge suggest that there is further scope for more services to and from Inverness at peak periods. New freight prospects are encouraging and the scenic nature of the two lines is increasingly attractive to charter operators. The possibility of a regular steam train is currently being investigated. It can be seen that the line has potential for more services in the future.

Let us take just one example, that of further increasing the number of commuter trains on weekday mornings and evenings. Since December 2008 there have been Inverness arrivals at 07.48, 08.12 and 08.53. The next arrival is at 10.35. Without a loop at Lentrán/Clunes the next arrival after 08.53 could not be until 09.40 given the present timetable, but it would be nearly impossible to path the outward working.

There is a good case for a commuter train in the opposite direction between Inverness and Dingwall. Many Inverness folk work in Dingwall, not least since Highlands and Islands Enterprise decentralised/outstationed many staff to Dingwall. With a Lentrán/Clunes loop, it would be possible to run a service at 07.50 to Dingwall returning at 08.50 and arriving in Inverness at 09.20, thus serving the market in both directions. Throughout the day, having this extra loop would allow further additional trains to run to and from Easter Ross in response to the congestion pressures on the A9 Kessock road bridge.

The evening commuter trains back north from Inverness are restricted to only two departures at 17.15 and 17.52 partly because there is a flight of incoming services between 16.28 and 17.09 occupying the long Muir of Ord to Inverness section. The previous northbound train leaves at 14.39 and it would certainly be useful to have one for the educational and shoppers' markets leaving around 16.00. A later service around 18.30 would also be attractive as there is currently a three hour gap until 21.09.

The case for the Lentrán to Clunes loop is based on firstly reducing the operating constraints caused by this congested long single track section which occurs at the start of the line. The second issue is in providing the scope for more trains to be run both at peak times and to fill the long gaps at other times of the day.

The FNL provides a valuable alternative to the private car in a fast expanding area of Scotland where road congestion on the approaches to and parking congestion within Inverness are becoming seriously damaging to the local economy.

The double track formation is already there and the signalling system is due for early replacement. It would be sensible to tackle the two together and extend conventional colour light signalling from Clachnaharry out to Dingwall. A consultant's report on this signalling solution has recently been completed for Hitrans, the regional transport agency. The cases for both the Lentrane loop and for replacement signalling were strongly argued in the Room for Growth report in 2004 and new signalling was seen as the key to achieving the reinstated loop.

During a period of recession it is important not to curtail investment for the future and FoFNL hopes that the Lentrane to Clunes loop project may be progressed during Control Period 5. Our 175 mile line covers the same distance as from London to Manchester and its single track nature imposes severe constraints on capacity and operating flexibility. We think this proposed loop reinstatement would make a big improvement.

FoFNL is very keen to work with Government Ministers, Transport Scotland, Network Rail and ScotRail to achieve the reinstatement of a loop between Lentrane and Clunes as an essential tool to permit further growth of services on the Far North Line to help reduce congestion and environmental damage in and north of Inverness.

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June 2009.